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YORUBA CULTURAL ORIENTATION

CHAPTER 1 – PROFILE **5**

INTRODUCTION	5
GEOGRAPHY	5
COASTAL PLAIN	5
YORUBA HIGHLANDS	5
CLIMATE	5
FLORA AND FAUNA	6
BODIES OF WATER	7
NIGER RIVER	7
OSUN RIVER	7
LAGOS LAGOON	7
BIGHT OF BENIN	7
MAJOR CITIES	8
LAGOS	8
IBADAN	8
ILORIN	9
OSHOGBO	9
HISTORY	9
EARLY HISTORY	9
THE KINGDOM OF OYO AND THE SLAVE TRADE	10
THE YORUBA CIVIL WARS AND THE END OF THE SLAVE TRADE	10
BRITISH COLONIZATION OF YORUBALAND	11
UNIFICATION OF NIGERIA	11
STEPS TOWARD INDEPENDENCE	11
AN INDEPENDENT NIGERIA	12
RECENT HISTORY	13
ECONOMY	13
MEDIA	14
LANGUAGE GROUPS	14
YORUBA	14
HAUSA	14
IGBO	15
IJAW	15

CHAPTER 2 RELIGION **16**

OVERVIEW OF MAJOR RELIGIONS	16
ANIMISM	16
ISLAM	16
CHRISTIANITY	17
ROLE OF RELIGION IN THE GOVERNMENT	18
INFLUENCE OF RELIGION ON DAILY LIFE	18
RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS	18
OSUN OSOGBO FESTIVAL	18
EID AL ADHA	18
RAMADAN	18

EID AL FITR	19
THE BIRTH OF THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD	19
EASTER	19
CHRISTMAS	19
BUILDINGS OF WORSHIP	19
BEHAVIOR IN PLACES OF WORSHIP	20
MOSQUES	20
CHURCHES	21
<u>CHAPTER 3 TRADITIONS</u>	<u>22</u>
GENDER ROLES IN TRADITIONAL YORUBA LIFE	22
GREETINGS	22
CLOTHING	24
HOSPITALITY	24
GIFT GIVING	25
FOOD AND EATING HABITS	26
WEDDINGS	27
FUNERALS	28
ISINKU	28
BURIALS	29
NON-RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS	29
EGUNGUN FESTIVAL	29
EYO FESTIVAL	29
FGM	30
BODY MARKINGS	30
DOS AND DON'TS	31
<u>CHAPTER 4 URBAN LIFE</u>	<u>32</u>
URBANIZATION ISSUES	32
SLUMS	32
AREA BOYS	33
HEALTH CARE	33
SANITATION	34
INFORMAL ECONOMY	34
STREET VENDORS	35
BEGGARS	35
EDUCATION AND SCHOOLS IN CITIES	35
TELECOMMUNICATIONS	36
RESTAURANTS	36
BUSINESS DINING	37
ORDERING	37
GETTING THE BILL	38
MARKETPLACE	39
URBAN TRAFFIC & TRANSPORTATION	41
<u>CHAPTER 5 RURAL LIFE</u>	<u>44</u>

LAND OWNERSHIP	44
RURAL ECONOMY	44
HEALTHCARE	45
RURAL EDUCATION	45
VILLAGE LIFE	46
WHO IS IN CHARGE?	47
GENDER ROLES IN RURAL AREAS	48
RURAL TRANSPORTATION ISSUES	48
CHECKPOINTS	49
LAND MINES	50

CHAPTER 6 FAMILY LIFE **51**

TYPICAL HOUSEHOLD	51
ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITY	51
STATUS OF ELDERLY AND CHILDREN	52
ELDERLY	52
CHILDREN	53
MARRIED LIFE	53
DIVORCE	54
FAMILY CELEBRATIONS	54
BIRTH	54
NAMING CEREMONY	54
NAMING CONVENTIONS	55

Chapter 1 – Profile

Introduction

The area of the Yoruba people, historically designated as Yorubaland, overflows into the Republic of Benin from the southwest corner of Nigeria. Over 20 million people worldwide speak Yoruba, making it the second largest language group in Africa. More than 18 million of these people live in southwest Nigeria, where they make up the total population of Ogun, Ondo, and Oyo states as well as the majority of the population of Lagos state. The state of Nigeria in turn is the most populated country in Africa. It shares borders with the Republic of Benin 773 km (480 mi), Chad 87 km (54 mi), Cameroon 1,690 km (1,050 mi), and Niger 1,497 km (930 mi), and borders the Gulf of Guinea for 774 km (480 mi).¹



© Javier Sánchez
Yoruban mother and child

Geography

Spreading north from the Gulf of Guinea and west from the Niger River into Benin, Yorubaland is one of the most populated areas of Nigeria, and is divided into a wide coastal plain and rugged highland region.

Coastal Plain

The coastal plains of Yorubaland consist of mangrove forests, swamplands, and tropical rainforests that extend an average of 80 km (50 mi) inland from the Gulf of Guinea. Barrier beaches run along the coast, providing shelter to the swamps inland. Lagoons, such as the one at Lagos, and estuaries dot the landscape. There is some oil production off the coast of southwest Nigeria and in the coastal plain of Yorubaland. Portions of the rainforest have been cleared for cash crops and subsistence agriculture.²

Yoruba Highlands

A gradual rise from the coast leads to the Yoruba Highlands. Located to the west of the Upper Niger River, these highlands consist of rugged terrain with rocky outcroppings surrounded by tall grass savannahs. Rivers and streams crisscross the terrain as it is the watershed for the northern regions.

Climate

Nigeria is a vast country spreading over numerous latitudinal zones and climate ranges. Yorubaland, in the southern portion of the country, is wetter than other regions, with more rainfall and humidity year round. The rainy season starts in February or March with

¹ *The Peoples of Africa: An Ethnohistorical Dictionary*. Olson, James Stuart. "Yoruba." 1996. Westport, Ct. Greenwood Publishing Group. http://books.google.com/books?id=MdaAdBC-_S4C&pg=PA606&lpg=PA606&dq=nigeria+yoruba+highlands&source=web&ots=dLdMoIyk9Y&sig=G DvsIrwqi2SuzjqpOfBr_EjrEyE#PPP6,M1

² Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia 2007. "Nigeria." No date. http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761557915/Nigeria.html#s109

a southwestern monsoon that moves north. While northern areas experience peak rainfall during the summer months, the southern areas undergo a dip in rainfall that allows for harvesting. A second rainy season occurs in southern Nigeria around October.³ The southwest receives 1,250 to 2,500 mm (49 to 98.5 in) of rainfall per year.⁴

The monsoon is followed by northwest trade winds that bring the *harmattan* (dust-laden windstorms) that blow over the Sahara. They normally affect all areas except a small portion of the southwest coast. Nonetheless, it has been reported that the *harmattan* has reached as far as Lagos in some years.

Yorubaland experiences a narrow temperature range with average winter highs of 31° C (87.8° F) and summertime highs of 28° C (82.4° F). Typically, a low temperature is 23° C (73.4° F). High humidity accompanies the year-round high temperatures.

Flora and Fauna

The vegetation of the coastal plains varies from coconut trees and palms on the beaches to red mangroves in the saltwater swamps. Freshwater swamps include mahogany trees, ferns, and palms. These give way to a tropical rainforest that flourishes in the humid climate. The trees of the rainforest form a canopy as tall as 60 m (200 ft). Some of the rainforest has been replaced by rubber and cacao trees on large plantations and by subsistence agriculture.



© Tarina Peterson
Palm trees near Lagos

Although Nigeria is located in a tropical rainforest belt, only 12% of the country remains forested.⁵ Tall grasses and shorter trees dominate the Yoruba Highlands.

Natural fauna has also fallen prey to the fast growing population, which has contributed to a loss of land and overhunting. The animals that once roamed free, such as gorillas, monkeys, elephants, buffalo, lions, and leopards, can now only be found in remote places or wildlife reserves. Wildcats, snakes, birds, hippopotami, and crocodiles exist in the rainforest and major rivers. A decline in aquatic wildlife, such as manatees and waterfowl, has been seen in the major waterways of Nigeria.

³ BBC Weather. Country Guide. "Nigeria." No date.
http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/world/country_guides/results.shtml?tt=TT005690

⁴ MongaBay. Country Studies. "Nigeria: Geography." No date.
http://www.mongabay.com/reference/country_studies/nigeria/GEOGRAPHY.html

⁵ Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia 2007. "Nigeria: Land and Resources." No date.
http://encarta.msn.com/text_761557915___109/Nigeria.html

Bodies of Water

Niger River

The Niger River flows southeastward from the shared borders of the Republics of Benin and Niger in the west. It snakes its way down through Nigeria, and after joining the Benue River, flows south to the Niger Delta. The total length of the Niger River is 4,200 km (2,600 mi), making it the third longest river in Africa. It also divides Nigeria into three regions: north, west, and east.⁶ Yorubaland encompasses much of the left side of the “Y” created by the Niger River.



© Terry Whalebone
Niger River Delta

Osun River

This perennial river flows into Lagos Lagoon from the northern part of Osun state. In order to provide water for the surrounding communities, the Osun River has been dammed at both Ede and Ire. Named after the Yoruba goddess Osun, this river is also home to the Osun-Osogbo sacred grove dedicated to her. The grove is a symbol of Yoruban identity, and contains shrines and sanctuaries reminiscent of the ancient sacred groves that once dotted Yorubaland. Today, it is a World Heritage Site and is home to the annual Animist Osun-Osogbo festival in August or September.

Lagos Lagoon

Acting as a link between the Atlantic Ocean and the Lekki Lagoon, Lagos Lagoon is located in the heart of metropolitan Lagos. With an area of 6354.7 sq km (2435.4 sq mi), this lagoon acts as a place of recreation and a means of transportation. Unfortunately, it is also a dumpsite for industrial and household waste. The highest levels of pollution are found around Lagos Harbor, which connects the lagoon to the Atlantic Ocean. This harbor also houses Nigeria’s main port.⁷

Numerous small islands in the lagoon provide ground for stilt houses used by those who do not live in the city. Shantytowns, such as Makoko, are inhabited by once nomadic fishermen and their families, many of whom have migrated from Benin in search of a better income.

Bight of Benin

This bay, located in the western part of the Gulf of Guinea in the Atlantic Ocean, extends 640 km (400 mi) from Cape St. Paul, Ghana to the Niger Delta. During the 16th to 19th centuries, the coastal area around Lagos was referred to as the “Slave Coast” due to the

⁶ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Niger River.” 2007. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9108301/Niger-River>

⁷ University of Lagos. Okusipe, Obafemi McArthur. “Lagos Lagoon Coastal Profile: Information Database for Planning Theory.” No date. <http://gis.esri.com/library/userconf/proc04/docs/pap1579.pdf>

extensive slave trading that took place here.⁸ The majority of those captured in the area around the Bight of Benin were Yoruba people sent to the Americas.⁹

Major Cities

Lagos

Lagos is the largest city in Nigeria and with a population of over 15 million, it is also one of the world's mega-cities.¹⁰ With an 8% population growth rate, by 2010 Lagos will have a population of over 20 million people, making it one of the five largest cities in the world.¹¹

Yoruba fishermen in the late 15th century founded the modern city. It was the Portuguese, however, who gave the island city the name Lagos. In order to stop the slave trade, the British attacked Lagos and took control, making it a colony in 1861. The British made Lagos the capital of Nigeria and it remained so until 1991, when the capital was moved to Abuja.¹²

Today, Lagos is also the educational and cultural hub of Nigeria, housing the National Library, National Museum, and National Theater, as well as numerous colleges and universities. An ethnically diverse population from other parts of the country brings a mix of cultures and religions to this massive metropolis. Lagos Island is the city's center, but much of the population lives throughout the lagoon on smaller islands or in slums. In fact, two out of three residents live in areas with no reliable access to drinking water, electricity, or waste disposal.¹³

Ibadan

The capital city of Oyo State is also the second largest in Nigeria. Ibadan, an important trade and commercial center, is located 160 km (100 mi) from the coast on seven rocky hills. With a population of 2.5 million, it is much smaller than Lagos and far behind in modern growth.¹⁴ Ancient Ibadan, expanded by Yoruba armies, and modern Ibadan exist side by side. Mud houses and dirt roads characterize the ancient district, while the modern sections have concrete buildings and paved roads.¹⁵ Television studios, the University of Ibadan, and two major stadiums are located here.

⁸ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Bight of Benin." 2007. <http://concise.britannica.com/ebc/article-9357020/Bight-of-Benin#citation>

⁹ Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia. "Bight of Benin." 2007. http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761579767/Bight_of_Benin.html

¹⁰ IRIN. "Nigeria: Lagos, the mega-city of slums." 5 September 2006. <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=60811>

¹¹ Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia 2007. "Lagos (Nigeria)." No date. [http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761556930/Lagos_\(Nigeria\).html](http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761556930/Lagos_(Nigeria).html)

¹² Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Lagos." 2007. <http://concise.britannica.com/ebc/article-9369620/Lagos>

¹³ IRIN. Nigeria: Lagos, the mega-city of slums. 5 September 2006. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=60811>

¹⁴ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. Ibadan. No date. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9041874/Ibadan>

¹⁵ World 66. "Ibadan Travel Guide." No date. <http://www.world66.com/africa/nigeria/ibadan>

Ilorin

Ilorin, the capital of Kwara State, is a historic Yoruba city with a majority Muslim population. After rebelling against the Oyo Empire in 1817, Ilorin became a part of the Fulani State of Sokoto. In 1897, the British took control.¹⁶ Today, it is an industrial, transportation, and educational center with both colleges and universities. It is home to over 750,000 people. Many ethnic groups, including Yoruba, Hausa, Fulani, and Gobir, live together united by their shared faith.

Oshogbo

Known as the “Art City” of Nigeria, Oshogbo is the capital of Osun State. What started as a small town of farmers has grown to a population of over 475,000.¹⁷ When the Yoruba Wars began in the 1830s, many Yoruba people migrated to Oshogbo. In 1840, a turning point in the battle over this city occurred when Yoruba armies defeated the Fulani.

With cotton gins, a steel mill, textile industries, and cigarette and food facilities as well as agriculture, Oshogbo is now a commercial and farming city. Serviced by an airport, Oshogbo is also a road and rail link for western Nigeria. It is home to the annual Osun-Oshogbo festival, a celebration of Yoruba culture.



© Michele Valcke
Building in Oshogbo

History

Early History

Empires, such as the Yoruba, Hausa, and Ibo, originated during the first millennium B.C.E.¹⁸ Formed by nomads and united by a common language and culture, the Yoruba people dominated the area west of the Niger River where they established city-states. Each state was headed by an Oba (leader) supported by a council of chiefs. Although this title is not passed along bloodlines, each successive Oba is thought to be a descendent of the founding Oba of the city.¹⁹

The state of Ile-Ife, founded in 850 C.E., was the most influential of the original Yoruba city-states. Many believe this to be the original sacred city and the place where traditional Yoruba beliefs are centered.²⁰ Ife’s importance to the development of the Yoruba culture is still apparent in the city today. Around 1350 C.E., yet another kingdom, the Kingdom of Oyo, emerged as an important trade center. By the 17th century, Oyo had become a

¹⁶ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Ilorin.” 2007. <http://concise.britannica.com/ebc/article-9367824/Ilorin>

¹⁷ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Oshogbo.” 2007. <http://concise.britannica.com/ebc/article-9374203/Oshogbo>

¹⁸ Economist. Country Briefings: Nigeria. “History in Brief.” 15 November 2004. <http://www.economist.com/countries/Nigeria/profile.cfm?folder=History%20in%20brief>

¹⁹ University of Iowa. “Yoruba Information.” 07 March 1999. <http://www.uiowa.edu/~africart/toc/people/Yoruba.html>

²⁰ Indiana University. “Cutting to the Essence: History.” 29 March 1995. <http://www.fa.indiana.edu/~conner/yoruba/cut.html>

force in political economy second to none, and with its presence, Yorubaland expanded further north.²¹

The Kingdom of Oyo and the Slave Trade

The area's climate and topography were conducive to the breeding of horses, which in turn led to the development of an impressive cavalry. With this army, the Oyo Kingdom was able to spread from the savannah down to the coast, where it gained invaluable access to European trade. Slaves taken during the many wars were used for labor, but were also traded with Europeans for guns, cloth, and other metals. Trade goods were taxed as they passed



© 2007 Clipart.com
Nigerian horseman

through Yorubaland to Hausaland in the north, bringing more wealth to the kingdom. The slave trade grew so large that the area became known as the "Slave Coast."²² It is estimated that over 3.5 million slaves came from Nigeria, mainly from the Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, and Ibibio ethnic groups.²³ However, as slave trade diminished due to the British ban implemented in 1807, the Kingdom of Oyo began to fall.

The Yoruba Civil Wars and the End of the Slave Trade

In 1817, the Oyo Kingdom fell into a civil war that began when the cavalry, made up of Muslim slaves, revolted and joined the Sokoto Caliphate. As the citizens of Oyo retreated to other Yoruba cities, the civil war spread, and by 1830 all of Yorubaland was at war.²⁴ Ibadan, Owo, Warri, and Abeokuta, the centers of power, fought over trade routes and continued to capture slaves. Ibadan was able to hold off the spread of the Fulani, and kept taking slaves to the trading post at Port Lagos.

Although Britain and other countries barred citizens from taking part in the slave trade, ships continued to come to Lagos until the mid 1800s. The civil wars led to the exportation of one million Yoruba slaves throughout the 19th century. In order to stem the movement of people, the British Navy aligned themselves along the coast of West Africa. This continued trade, as well as the internal troubles, led Britain to exert its power over the coast starting with the annexation of Lagos in 1861. Gradually, British jurisdiction over the Nigerian coast spread.²⁵

²¹ Country Studies. Nigeria. "Early States Before 1500." December 1990. <http://www.country-studies.com/nigeria/early-states-before-1500.html>

²² *Bringing the State Back In*. Evans, Peter B., Rueschemeyer, Dietrich, Skocpol, Theda. Ch. 9 [p. 307] New York: Cambridge University Press. 1985.

²³ Country Studies. Nigeria. "The Slave Trade." December 1990. <http://www.country-studies.com/nigeria/the-slave-trade.html>

²⁴ On War. Wars of the World. "Civil War in Oyo 1817-1835." 16 December 2000. <http://www.onwar.com/aced/data/oscar/oyo1817.htm>

²⁵ Country Studies. "Abolition of the Slave Trade." December 1990. <http://www.country-studies.com/nigeria/preface.html>

British Colonization of Yorubaland

The settlement at Lagos became a British colony in 1886, the same year the Royal Niger Company was established. Founded by George Goldie, this trade company conducted commerce along the Niger River, effectively limiting French and German access. When French missionaries expressed interest in working along the Niger, the British quickly asserted their control over the area by proclaiming the greater Lagos area and the Delta protectorates of the British crown. In 1894, these two protectorates and the Royal Niger Company merged into one Niger Coast Protectorate. By the early 1900s, the British had colonized Yorubaland and Lagos became the capital of the South.²⁶

Unification of Nigeria

Frederick Lugard, the first British high commissioner of Northern Nigeria, began the unification of the North and South. In 1914 he was appointed the governor general of the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria. Acting from the capital in Lagos, Lugard put in place a system of indirect rule, which allowed the local rulers to maintain their region's traditions and culture.²⁷ In order to maintain British control and lessen the chance of a large resistance, this system acted to separate ethnic groups along regional boundaries. Over time, indirect rule did well in the North, was functioning at times in the West, but operated poorly in the East. British influence was much more evident in the South than in the North where the Muslim Hausa ruled. The Igbo and Yoruba were introduced to Western education, Christianity, and English as an official language. In addition, the South was introduced to a system of taxes modeled after a traditional Hausa system. This was the cause of discontent in the South.²⁸ Although the economy began to grow under British control, the development was imbalanced between the regions, leaving the North dragging behind.

Steps Toward Independence

The British system of government continued to change in order to quell the rumblings of dissatisfaction. One such change was the introduction of the Nigerian Legislative Council in 1922, which gave political representation to the people of the West and East, and spawned nationalism in Nigeria. The ideas of nationalism differed from the North to the South. The Hausa North's idea of nationalism was pro-Islamic while the South's feelings reflected more pro-Western ideals. Southern nationalists began to call for self-government. Groups such as the Igbo Federal Union and the Yoruba Egbe Omo Oduduwa formed, showing an early split along ethnic lines. These groups continued to splinter and change into the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (Igbo), the Action Group (Yoruba), and the Northern People's Congress (Hausa).²⁹

²⁶ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Nigeria: The Arrival of the British." 2007. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-55316/Nigeria>

²⁷ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Nigeria: Nigeria as a Colony." 2007. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-55317/Nigeria>

²⁸ Country Studies. "Unification of Nigeria." December 1990. <http://www.country-studies.com/nigeria/unification-of-nigeria.html>

²⁹ Country Studies. "Emergence of Nigerian Nationalism." December 1990. <http://www.country-studies.com/nigeria/emergence-of-nigerian-nationalism.html>

The increase in ethnic and regional nationalism triggered the creation of a federal system based on the three regions of Nigeria. The North was under Hausa control while the South was split into the West and East. Each region was internally self-governed while external matters were up to a centralized, yet weaker federal government.³⁰

An Independent Nigeria

With Nigeria slated to become an independent nation in October 1960, elections were held in 1959. Neither the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) nor the Northern People's Congress (NPA) won a clear majority. A combined government was created, with Nnamdi Azikiwe from the NCNC becoming the governor general and Abubaker Tafawa Belewa the prime minister. Azikiwe of the NCNC became Governor General, and when Nigeria became a republic in 1963, the first president.³¹



© Munir Squires
National Independence Monument

Following several years of dispute over elections and numerous waves of regional conflict, Igbo army officers from the Southeast staged a coup in January 1966. The prime minister was assassinated by the army's commander in chief, Major General Johnson Aguiyi Ironsi. Although Ironsi pledged to restore civilian rule, his first act was to issue a decree abolishing national and regional government. The Muslim majority in the North viewed this as an attempt to consolidate power into one central Igbo state, and it was met with violence. In July of the same year, a second coup headed by Hausa army officials put Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon in power. His road to civilian rule was interrupted by the attempted secession of the eastern region into the Independent Republic of Biafra. A civil war lasted from 1967 until 15 January 1970, when Biafra was ultimately forced to rejoin the Republic of Nigeria. Attempts to reintegrate the Igbo into Nigerian society and politics were largely unsuccessful and ethnic tensions remained.³²

Nigeria began to rebuild itself during the oil boom of the early 1970s. Government corruption and an uneven spread of wealth, however, once again led to a coup in 1975, this time bloodless. The new military regime, led by General Murtala Muhammad, moved the capital from Lagos to the more central city of Abuja, and divided the country into 19 states. A year later, Muhammad was assassinated and General Olusegun Obasanjo initiated a return to civilian rule. Elections, decried as corrupt, were held in 1979. This government persisted until 1983, when a succession of military dictatorships began that were to last 16 years.³³

³⁰ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Nigeria: Nigeria as a Colony." 2007.
<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-55317/Nigeria>

³¹ Info Please. Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 6th Edition. "Nigeria: History." 2007.
<http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/world/A0860005.html>

³² Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State. February 2008. Background Note: Nigeria.
<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2836.htm>

³³ Institute for Security Studies/Institute d'études de securite. Nigeria: History and Politics. No date.
<http://www.iss.co.za/Af/profiles/Nigeria/Politics.html>

Recent History

Since the Nigerian military is dominated by Northerners, military rule has meant several decades of a Hausa-led government. Yorubans remain bitter about the 1993 election in which a wealthy Yoruba businessman, M.K.O. Abiola, was the clear winner at the ballot box.³⁴ The results, however, were nullified by a military coup and Abiola was imprisoned. The election of another Yoruban, Olusegun Obasanjo, in 1999 did little to right this injustice because he was perceived as answering to Northerners rather than representing the interests of his own people.³⁵ His tenure was judged more favorably abroad. He did much to restore Nigeria's standing in the international community after human rights abuses during the final years of military rule had isolated the country. Efforts to modify the constitution to allow Obasanjo to stand for a third term failed. In June 2007, Yar'Adua, a Muslim Northerner, succeeded him in the first electoral transfer of power from one civilian government to another. The election itself, however, was widely regarded as riddled with fraud and voter intimidation, which does not bode well for the country's long-term stability.³⁶

Economy

Yorubaland's economy continues to be based on a combination of agriculture, industrial arts, and trade, as it has been for centuries. The central government, perhaps to offset its failure to allocate a share of petroleum revenues to the region, heavily subsidizes part of the agricultural sector. The development of urban centers within the surrounding Yoruba farmlands in past centuries led to the introduction of urban markets and trade networks. These types of commerce are still important today.

Following the dissolution of the slave trade, Yorubaland was introduced to cash crops such as cocoa, yams, cotton, and kola. Historically, farming, fishing, hunting, and raising livestock were a part of daily life as there was no real distinction between towns and rural land. While at one time agriculture provided an income for upwards of two-thirds the Yoruba population, it is no longer as profitable. Likewise, the increase in population has overwhelmed the subsistence farming industry to such a point that Nigeria must now import food. Given the low returns for subsistence farming, civil unrest, and the oil boom in Nigeria, many Yorubans have left farms for jobs in the commercial, service, and government sectors.³⁷



Lagos, which was once the political capital, remains the economic center of Nigeria and the seat of numerous governmental agencies. With over 2,000 manufacturing industries,

³⁴ Dispatch Magazine, U.S. Department of State. "Testimony: George Moose on Nigeria." 20 July 1995. <http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/ERC/briefing/dispatch/1995/html/Dispatchv6no31.html>

³⁵ Global Security. "Military Nigeria Southwest Ethnic Economic Rivalries." 27 April 2005. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/nigeria-3.htm>

³⁶ Johns Hopkins University, SAISPHERE. Lewis, Peter. "Struggling for Democracy in Nigeria." 2007. <http://www.sais-jhu.edu/pubaffairs/publications/saisphere/winter07/lewis.html>

³⁷ Every Culture. Barnes, Sandra. "Yoruba Economy." No date. <http://www.everyculture.com/Africa-Middle-East/Yoruba.html>

200 financial institutions, and the Nigerian Stock exchange, Lagos holds 60% of Nigeria's industrial investment and foreign trade, and draws in 65% of commercial activities within the country.³⁸ In addition, Lagos is home to a booming informal economy that has attracted migrants from all parts of the country.

Media

During military rule, media coverage dwindled as journalists were jailed and newspapers were shut down or brutally censored. Since the new democratic government took office, the media has more freedom although journalists do come under fire. Newspapers have become expensive so many Nigerians rely on radio broadcasts for information. Televisions remain an urban commodity found in the homes of the wealthy. Considered the most vibrant in Africa, Nigeria's media offers both government-run and privately owned outlets, with newspapers, television, and radio broadcasts disseminating information nationally. In addition to the 36 state-run radio stations, there are 280 privately owned radio and television stations.³⁹ National and local newspapers abound, most of which are published in Lagos or Abuja.

Language Groups

Yoruba

At 21% of the total population, the Yoruba speakers make up the majority population in Southwestern Nigeria.⁴⁰ This linguistic group, which is part of the Niger-Congo family, can be further divided into three dialects: Northwest Yoruba, Southeast Yoruba, and Central Yoruba. Used in government, education, and media, Yoruba is spoken by over 20 million in Nigeria as a first or second language. Yoruba continues to be the most urban ethno-linguistic group in Nigeria, and it forms the majority population in Lagos, the largest city in the country. Since independence and the transfer of the capital from Lagos to Abuja in 1991, Yoruba language presence in politics and official discourse has diminished.⁴¹

Hausa

Most of northern Nigeria is home to the Hausa and Fulani ethnic groups, who make up 29% of the total population. Hausa is the most widely spoken language in Africa, with 24 million first language speakers and 15 million second language speakers. Geography has divided Hausa into eastern, western, and northern dialects.⁴² A member of the Chadic language group, Hausa was



© Mike Blyth
Hausa boy

³⁸ Lagos State. "Investing in Lagos." No date. http://www.lagosstate.gov.ng/c/portal/layout?p_1_id=PUB.1095.3

³⁹ BBC News. "Country Profile: Nigeria." 16 October 2007. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/country_profiles/1064557.stm#media

⁴⁰ CIA World Factbook. "Nigeria." 18 October 2007. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html#People>

⁴¹ Languages of the World. National Virtual Translation Center. "Yoruba." 2007. <http://www.nvtc.gov/lotw/months/september/yoruba.html>

⁴² Languages of the World. National Virtual Translation Center. "Hausa." 2007. <http://www.nvtc.gov/lotw/months/july/hausa.html>

originally written using Arabic script, but a form using the Latin alphabet has become popular in recent years.⁴³

Regional resentment long fueled by the differences of the economically strong South and the politically powerful North led to fighting between the Hausa and Yoruba in late 1999. These ethnic groups make up the majority in their respective regions, but must coexist in the diverse cities of Kano and Lagos. However, introduction of Shari'a law in the North has sparked periodically sparked riots in the minority Christian communities there. When tensions rise, the fighting increases elsewhere, illustrating the matrix of underlying ethnic tensions in Nigeria.⁴⁴

Igbo

The language of the Igbo people is in the same Niger-Congo family as Yoruba. Spoken by 18 million people, there are approximately 30 different dialects. In the Delta region of Nigeria, Igbo is an official language used in trade, media, and government.⁴⁵ It is written using the Latin alphabet.



© Stefaan Christopher
Igbo woman

Historically, the Igbo and the Yoruba interacted and held positions in the British-led government. Following independence, the Igbo presence in politics gradually diminished. The discovery of oil in the Niger Delta region and fear of loss of the resulting revenue led the Igbo to declare an independent Republic of Biafra in their region in June of 1967. A 30-month long civil war followed, during which hundreds of Igbo died. Although the contested area and the Igbo people were reintegrated into Nigeria, tensions still remain.⁴⁶

Ijaw

A collection of indigenous peoples, the Ijaw speak nine related languages that are part of the Niger-Congo family. Their traditional lands in the Niger Delta have been those hardest hit by oil exploration. However, limited political access has meant that little of the oil wealth has filtered back into their community. Some Ijaw have formed militant groups, such as the Ijaw Youth Congress, to seek economic compensation for the environmental damage done to their homeland. Ijaw and Yoruba relations have been strained for some time due to ethnic clashes throughout the region.⁴⁷

⁴³ Omniglot. "Hausa." No date. <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/hausa.htm>

⁴⁴ BBC News. Pearce, Justin. "Religion: Nigeria's latest flashpoint." 22 February 2000. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/652118.stm>

⁴⁵ UCLA Language Materials Project. "Igbo." No date. <http://www.lmp.ucla.edu/Profile.aspx?menu=004&LangID=13>

⁴⁶ PBS. "Oil and Politics in Nigeria." 5 April 2007. http://www.pbs.org/newshour/indepth_coverage/africa/nigeria/ethnic.html

⁴⁷ *High Stakes and Stakeholders: Oil Conflict and Security in Nigeria*. Omeje, Kenneth. "7.5.1 The Odi Massacre [p.156]." 2006. Burlington, VT. Ashgate Publishing Company. <http://books.google.com/books?id=IH0bSRZP8bEC&pg=PA156&lpg=PA156&dq=ijaw+yoruba+relations&source=web&ots=UhmRyMsTec&sig=fsHXZ7qXrvTdnvaDorTAIGca21Y#PPR4,M1>

Chapter 2 Religion

Overview of Major Religions

In Yorubaland, Muslim and Christian traditions and practices blend with the traditional beliefs of animists⁴⁸. Occasionally, large families include adherents of all three religious practices. Crosses are sometimes found on Muslim graves, and both Christians and Muslims can be found at the sacred Yoruba groves praying to the *orishas* during the animist festival season. All of Yoruba is united in the annual festivals and traditional rituals that are ingrained in the culture. This illustrates that Yoruba people define themselves by ethnicity, first; and religion, second.

Animism

The ancient, animist religion of Yorubaland is one that is based on a wide range of *orishas*, or voodoo-like deities, that are associated with nature and daily life. Each of these *orishas*, which are said to number in the hundreds, has its own domain. *Olorun*, the chief deity, is not worshipped but seen as the “creator of all things.” *Shango*, the god of thunder; *Eshu*, the trickster god; and *Ogun*, the god of iron, war, and technology; are worshipped in elaborate rituals.⁴⁹ Yet as central as the *orishas* are to Yoruba beliefs, their names may differ from one region to the next.



© Jacques Gré
Osun Sacred Forest

In addition to honoring deities, Yoruban animism places importance on finding one’s purpose in life. The underlying belief in predestined paths shapes the life of each individual. A *babalawos* (priest) performs a divination following a child’s birth that will help determine the type of person this child will become (an achiever, an assistor, or a bystander) and what destiny will unfold for the child. As a child grows, he or she is learns from the spiritual world during a period known as “morning.” This period, which lasts until age fifty, is also the time when the individual raises a family and encounters what is thought to be the hardest times in life. After age fifty, individuals enter into the “evening” phase. Now, it is hoped that they will enjoy life and prepare for the spiritual world. Death itself is viewed not as an ending, but as a transition from one plane of existence to another.⁵⁰

Islam

Islam was founded in Saudi Arabia by Mohammad in the 7th century C.E. Following his death in 632 C.E., Islam split into two branches: Sunni and Shi’a. Because Mohammad had not chosen a successor, his followers were left to decide who should be the next *caliph*, or leader. The two branches of Islam have survived to this day. Both forms spread

⁴⁸ Animism – An ancient African folk religion that predates Islam and Christianity. It attributes spirits that can influence human lives to inanimate objects (e.g., trees and stones).

⁴⁹ University of Iowa. “Yoruba Information.” 07 March 1999.
<http://www.uiowa.edu/~africart/toc/people/Yoruba.html>

⁵⁰ University of Georgia. Ojo, Akinloye Ed. “Yoruba Omo Oduduwa.” 1999.
<http://www.uga.edu/aflang/yoruba/oduduwa.htm>

quickly through North Africa, the Iberian Peninsula, and parts of Asia. Today it is the second largest religion in the world with over one billion adherents.⁵¹

Sunni Islam came to Nigeria in the 11th century and slowly spread throughout the country. Although the Oyo Empire was in contact with the Hausa Fulani in the north as trade partners for centuries, religious conversions did not take place until later. When the Muslim slaves revolted in the early 1800s, the city of Ilorin was claimed as part of the Sokoto Caliphate. The Fulani tribe pushed into Yorubaland in the 19th century, spreading Islam during the civil wars. As Muslims established themselves in Yoruba cities, Islam began to expand and reached its peak around 1900. At that time, half the population of Lagos was Muslim.⁵²

The Sunni Islam branch follows the five pillars of Islam. These are the *shahada* (profession of one's faith), *salah* (daily prayer), *zakah* (giving of alms), *sawm* (fasting during Ramadan), and *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca). Yoruba Islam, the form of Islam practiced in Yorubaland, embraces these five pillars but is less organized than the Islam practiced by the Hausa to the north.⁵³ As such, Yoruba Islam has adapted to accommodate existing Yoruba culture. Yoruba Islam is a mix of Islamic beliefs, traditional values, and cultural practices. Even the application of Shari'a law is not quite as strict as in the north, and Yoruba law takes precedence over other forms of jurisprudence.⁵⁴

Christianity

During the colonization of Yorubaland in the mid 19th century, missionaries came by way of sea and moved north. Today, the most prominent Christian groups are the Protestants in the south and east, and the Baptists in the north and west. The British Church Missionary Society (CMS), who opened the first missions in the 1840s, were particularly influential on the Yoruba. Church services have changed over the years to reflect more of the local culture, and now include African music and dance.



© Moisés Nazário
National Cathedral in Abuja

A breakaway movement called Aladura, meaning “prayer people,” began in 1918. Following the introduction of the Anglican Church, a group of young Yoruba were dissatisfied with the European control of the Church and a lack of spiritual power. They began a movement that endorsed the belief of divine healing and prayer protection. Several groups or individual congregations have been formed, with the Church of the Lord being the largest. These all integrate Anglican and African rituals as well as the

⁵¹ Religion Facts. “Fast Facts on Islam.” 17 March 2004. <http://www.religionfacts.com/islam/fastfacts.htm>

⁵² “Nigeria [p. 60].” Steed, Christopher and Westerlund, David. In *Islam Outside the Arab World*. Westerlund, David and Ingvar Svanberg, Eds. 1999. NY, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

⁵³ New York Times. Onishi, Norimitsu. “Islam Meets Africa and Islam Bows.” 09 January 2000. http://www.artsci.wustl.edu/~anthro/courses/306/islam_nigeria.html

⁵⁴ *The Yoruba Today*. Eades, J.S. “Belief Systems and Religious Organisations.” 1980. Cambridge University Press. <http://lucy.ukc.ac.uk/YorubaT/yt6.html>

practice of healing sessions and rituals.⁵⁵ In addition to fervent praying and fasting, adherents of Aladura believe in witchcraft.⁵⁶

Role of Religion in the Government

As Nigeria became a unified country, differences in governance concerning the role of religion in the state came to light. While the north called for an Islamic state, the south preferred a more western approach. These differences still exist today. Following the return to democratic rule in 1999, the new constitution permitted local governments in northern states to adopt *shari'a* law. However, the states that make up Yorubaland have opted to not implement *shari'a*, even for their Muslim population.

Influence of Religion on Daily Life

Among the Yoruba, religion has less influence on daily life than does the culture. Marriage and friendship are common between those of different faiths. Each religion, however, has its daily ritual observances. Muslims heed the call to pray five times a day. Those practicing the traditional religion are aware of the *orishas'* involvement in daily life. Art reflecting the gods, goddesses, and ancestors can be seen in households and throughout the towns. These manifestations of higher powers are often prayed to or worshipped in return for blessings.

Religious Holidays

Osun Osogbo Festival

Held in the Osun Sacred Forest, this festival is an integral part of the traditional Yoruba religion. Every August, Yoruba come from far and wide to worship Osun, the goddess of fertility, protection, and blessing. Lasting for two weeks, this festival is filled with dancing, drumming, and celebration.



© lily / flickr.com
Festival drummers

Eid al Adha

Eid al Adha, or the Feast of the Sacrifice, marks the end of the *Hajj*, which is pilgrimage to Mecca. It is also called *Babbar Sallah*. An animal, such as a ram, is slaughtered in commemoration of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son when commanded to do so by God. The meat of the sacrificial animal is shared among the community. In addition, people attend a *Durbar*, a festival honoring the Emir.

Ramadan

Every year, according to the Islamic calendar, Muslims fast during daylight hours in the month of Ramadan. Fasting means no eating, drinking, smoking, or sexual relations between sunrise and sunset. After sundown, families get together to dine and celebrate throughout the evening. Out of courtesy to Muslims, non-Muslims should refrain from eating, drinking, or smoking in public during Ramadan.

⁵⁵ Religion Facts. "Aladura." 19 December 2005. <http://www.religionfacts.com/a-z-religion-index/aladura.htm>

⁵⁶ African Christianity. Lettinga, Dr. Neil. "Christianity In Africa South of the Sahara: Aladura." 07 June 2000. <http://www.bethel.edu/~letnie/AfricanChristianity/SSAAladura.html>

Eid al Fitr

The end of Ramadan is marked by Eid al Fitr. This feast, which can last for several days, is preceded by morning prayers. After communal prayers and a *Durbar*, families get together to celebrate and share meals.

The Birth of the Prophet Muhammad

Celebrated during the Arabic month of Rabi'a, the timing of this feast varies in the Western calendar. The *moulud an-nabi*, or Birthday of the Prophet, marks the birth of Islam's prophet, Muhammad. On this day, Muslims pray in mosques and give alms to the poor.

Easter

The Christian Easter celebrations begin with Good Friday, which is spent quietly worshipping in church. Joyous celebrations take place on the following Sunday and Monday. Large meals or picnics are held and people gather to play drums and dance.



© Ellie / flickr.com
Easter procession

Christmas

The Christmas season is a time for family, friends, and joyous celebrations. Prior to December 25, families shop for food to prepare for the Christmas meal, which often includes stews made from lamb, goat, chicken, or beef. Food preparations are underway on Christmas Eve. Christmas morning in Yorubaland is often spent in church, followed by dancing and eating at home.

Buildings of Worship

Lagos, the largest city in Yorubaland, is home to numerous mosques and churches. The Shitta Bay Mosque, built in 1892, still stands along the waterfront of Lagos Lagoon. Built by the architect Joas Baptista Da Costa from Brazil, the mosque showcases Brazilian architectural style. The Holy Cross Cathedral and Christ Church Cathedral are also examples of foreign architecture. A French priest, Reverend Simon, undertook the building of the gothic-inspired Holy Cross Cathedral, completed in 1942. The other gothic-style church, Christ Church Cathedral, is home to the Anglican Diocese of Nigeria. Although it was not completed until 1945, its keystone was laid in 1925 by Edward, the Prince of Wales.⁵⁷

Animism is still practiced by many Yorubans at sacred groves such as the Osun Sacred Forest. This grove is said to be home to the Goddess Osun, and is recognized as a linking identity for all Yoruba people. An annual festival is held here and draws all Yorubans, regardless of religious affiliations. In 2005, the grove was declared a World Heritage Site.

⁵⁷ Lagos State Waterfront and Tourism. "Other Tourist Sites." 2004.
<http://www.lagoswaterfront.org/others.htm>

Behavior in Places of Worship

Mosques

Asking permission to enter a mosque is advised as some mosques do not allow non-Muslims to enter. Remove your shoes at the door when entering a mosque. Be respectful of those worshipping inside. Speak in a soft voice to ensure that you do not disturb others. A Muslim's prayer is nullified if someone walks in front of them.



© Raphew Roland
Oyo mosque

Exchange 1: May I enter the mosque?

Soldier:	May I enter the mosque?	shay mo lee wo mo shalaashe?
Local:	Yes.	banee

Men should dress in a conservative manner, wearing clean, pressed trousers and shirts. Shorts as well as tight fitting shirts are not acceptable. Shoes must be removed prior to entering a mosque, as well as before entering a Muslim's home.

Exchange 2: Must I take off my shoes inside the mosque?

Soldier:	Must I take off my shoes inside the mosque?	shay mo nee laatee bo bata neeno mo shalaashe?
Local:	Yes.	banee

Men and women typically do not pray together. A separate room or area of the mosque is often reserved for the women, and they may have a separate entrance. Women who enter a mosque must cover their head with a scarf, as well as wear clothing that provides maximum coverage. Short skirts, low-cut blouses, and in general, clothing that shows flesh is not permitted.

Exchange 3: Do I need to cover my head?

Soldier:	Do I need to cover my head?	shay mo nee laatee booree?
Local:	Yes.	banee

It is advisable to inquire if a mosque may be visited, and to call ahead and schedule a time when prayers are not being held. Prayers are held five times a day. Friday is the Islamic holy day, and the Friday midday prayer always takes place in the Mosque.

Exchange 4: When do you pray?

Soldier:	When do you pray?	iBawo neeya man BadraH?
Local:	We pray at noon.	a man BadraH nee oo sa

Churches

While in a church, one should be respectful toward other church-goers. It may be advisable to ask permission to enter as doing so after the start of services may cause an unwelcome interruption.

Exchange 5: May I enter the church?

Soldier:	May I enter the church?	shay mo lee wo sho she?
Local:	Yes.	banee

Both men and women should dress in a conservative manner. Men are advised to wear loose-fitting pants and remove any earrings.⁵⁸ In addition, men should remove hats when entering a church. Some churches in Nigeria may ban women from wearing pants.⁵⁹ In addition, women should refrain from showing too much flesh. Long skirts, loose-fitting blouses, and a head covering is appropriate.



© Tarina Peterson
Christian church in Lagos

Some churches, such as the Celestial Church of Christ, require the removal of shoes prior to entering the building. If this is the case, shoes should be left outside the door.

Exchange 6: Must I take off my shoes inside the church?

Soldier:	Must I take off my shoes inside the church?	shay mo nee laatee bo bata neeno sho she?
Local:	Yes.	banee

⁵⁸ BBC News. Blunt, Elizabeth. "Nigerian Catholics Told to be Modest." 9 August 2004. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3549210.stm>

⁵⁹ The New Black Magazine. Vandu, Chippla. "Between Christian and Secular Talibans." 19 November 2007. <http://www.thenewblackmagazine.com/view.aspx?index=1087>

Chapter 3 Traditions

Gender Roles in Traditional Yoruba Life

It is in male and female pairs that God created all things. This Yoruba proverb highlights the importance of both male and female contributions to daily life and the reliance of one on the other.⁶⁰ In traditional Yoruba society, women play an important, yet separate, role in both the market economy and politics. As educational opportunities have improved, women’s presence in professional occupations has increased and their participation in the economy has continued.⁶¹ Today, women are active members of the economy, engaging in trade, farming, weaving, and other occupations as well as participating in trade associations called *egbe*. Through these *egbe*, women are able to control the market in many ways. Both men and women are usually involved in various *egbes*, which may be made up of people who share a trade, hometown, school, or interest. These associations are an integral part of traditional Yoruba life.⁶²

Greetings

Greetings are central to everyday life in Yorubaland as well as throughout Nigeria. Everyone should be greeted, especially elders. Failing to do so will label a person as disrespectful. When meeting someone, stand and wait for them to offer you their hand.

Exchange 7: Good morning.

Soldier:	Good morning.	ikaaraw
Local:	Good morning.	ikaaraw

These formal and non-formal meetings always start with small talk, which should not be rushed or avoided. Familiarization between two or more people is a way for Yorubans to learn about the character of a person. A formal tone may be kept up for more than one meeting and it should be the Yoruban who adopts a more friendly tone first.



© Brian Kelley
Sunday gathering

Exchange 8: How are you?

Soldier:	How are you?	bawo nee?
Local:	Fine, very well.	mo waH daHdaH

In addition to asking about one’s self, Yorubas always inquire about one’s family. Even between strangers these types of questions are not too forward for a first meeting. It is a part of the long greeting meant to make individuals more familiar with one another.

⁶⁰ Africa Resource. *West Africa Review*. Ufomata, Titi. “Women in Africa: Their Socio-political and Economic Roles.” 2000. <http://www.africaresource.com/war/vol2.1/ufomata.html>

⁶¹ Country Studies. “Women.” December 1990. <http://www.country-studies.com/nigeria/women.html>

⁶² *Yoruba Hometowns: Community, Identity, and Development of Nigeria*. Trager, Lillian. “We Love Ourselves Abroad [p. 90].” 2001. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc.

Exchange 9: How is your family?

Soldier:	How is your family?	aHwoH beenko?
Local:	They are doing fine, thank you.	woH in shay daHdaH, ishay

Shaking hands, both when meeting someone and when leaving a group, is a routine gesture throughout urban Nigeria. When a woman is introduced, it is customary for her to curtsy. Men should wait for a woman to extend her hand before offering to shake it. In a more traditional setting, prostrating or kneeling upon introduction may be more appropriate.

Exchange 10: Good afternoon.

Soldier:	Good afternoon.	ikaaso
Local:	Good afternoon.	ikaaso

Traditionally, when meeting elders, men prostrate themselves and women kneel. Both get up once they are instructed to do so by the elder. During the conversation, honorific language is used by the younger person as this is a sign of respect and shows proper manners.⁶³ Titles are also important and are used until an invitation to use one's first name is offered. The terms "auntie" and "uncle" are used to refer to elders.



© Bennet Summers
Prostrating before elders

Exchange 11: Hi, Mr. Ojo.

Soldier:	Hi, Mr. Ojo.	bawo nee, mista ohjo
Local:	Hello!	bawo!
Soldier:	Are you doing well?	shay ohn shay daHdaH?
Local:	Yes.	banee

In addition to greetings, sympathy is very important. Appearing unsympathetic or uncaring can lead to feelings of distrust. Conversations will often be kept light and humorous to avoid any confrontation or serious discussions. The Yoruba use proverbs and songs to illustrate their points rather than arguing or using strong language.

Exchange 12: Good evening!

Soldier:	Good evening!	ikoo rey leh!
Local:	Good evening!	ikoo rey leh!

Politeness should last throughout all meetings until the goodbyes are said. Again, not greeting someone, even if it is to wish them a good evening or night, is considered very impolite.

⁶³ University of Georgia. Ojo, Akinloye Ed. "Yoruba Omo Oduduwa [p. 4]." 1999.
<http://www.uga.edu/aflang/yoruba/oduduwa.htm>

Exchange 13: Good night!

Soldier:	Good night!	oh daHraw!
Local:	Good night!	oh daHraw!

Clothing

Typical Western-style clothing, although worn modestly, is seen around the urban areas of Yorubaland. However, traditional dress, including the *gele* and *agbada*, is still worn in both urban and rural areas. The *gele* is a woman's headpiece that can be folded or tied in different ways. In addition, women may also wear a *buba*, or loose-fitting, long-sleeved blouse that falls to the waist, over an *iro*, or rectangular cloth wrapped about the waist. Men may also wear a *buba*, as well as *sokotos*, or trouser-like bottoms, an *agbada*, or long-sleeved, V-neck piece of cloth that is worn over the *buba*. Men's head coverings include the *fila*, a round cap, and the *abeti-aja*, which is a cap with triangular sides that are tied together above the head.⁶⁴



© lily / flickr.com
Traditional dress

Exchange 14: How should I dress?

Soldier:	How should I dress?	bawo nee ken shay mooraH?
Local:	Wear loose fitting clothes which cover your body.	wo aHso tee ko see aHraHree see leh

Visitors should take the warm weather into account. Loose-fitting clothes made of cotton keep people cool in the warm, sometimes humid, weather. Even in Lagos, modest dress is the norm and those showing too much skin may get unwanted attention. In addition, clothing should be in good condition, as appearance often is the first impression people have.

Exchange 15: Is this acceptable to wear?

Soldier:	Is this acceptable to wear?	shay mo lee wo aa yee?
Local:	Yes.	banee

Hospitality

The concepts of seniority and *iwa*, or character, overshadow the social interactions in Yorubaland. The elderly are always respected, since the Yoruba believe that knowledge comes with age. In turn, the elderly are encouraged to share their knowledge and wealth with friends and family in order to better other people. *Iwa* is determined by one's actions, or show of hospitality, generosity, and understanding. The belief is that one should be hospitable to others in case one may need that hospitality returned someday. Even if the return of hospitality is never needed, Yoruba believe that their generosity, or lack of, may

⁶⁴ Motherland Nigeria. "Attire." 2002. <http://www.motherlandnigeria.com/attire.html>

be passed on to their children.⁶⁵ An inhospitable person is not only labeled with a negative *iwa*, but may be deemed untrustworthy. This negative *iwa* would follow the person for their spiritual life after death.

Exchange 16: I really appreciate your hospitality.

Soldier:	I really appreciate your hospitality.	mo due Pay fU aHlayjo waH tee a shay
Local:	It is nothing.	ko ta Pay

Gift Giving

When invited to one's house, it is customary to bring a gift of candy, fruit, or nuts. Gifts of alcohol are not always acceptable, as Muslims do not drink. Often, money is given to the family's children in place of a gift. At the end of a visit, the guest gives a gift of money to all children under university age. If there are many children in the family and funds are limited, good manners dictate that the money should be given to the youngest child or children. Yorubans sometimes joke that the amount given may be dependent on the quality of entertainment.



© Bennet Summers
Gifts at a wedding

Always give gifts with the right or both hands. The left hand is viewed as unclean and should not be used by itself to pass or accept things. When a man gives a gift to a female hostess, he should say that the gift is from a female in his family, such as his sister, mother, or wife. Gifts should always be wrapped, yet they will not be unwrapped until the guest has left. Yorubans feel that unwrapping a gift right away would seem greedy. Upon being offered a gift, it is customary to decline twice before accepting on the third offer

Giving a gift that is red or black, or wrapping the gift in either color, is inappropriate. The color red signifies violence while black is associated with death and reserved for those who are in mourning.

Exchange 17: This gift is for you.

Soldier:	This gift is for you.	teera nee iboo yee
Local:	I cannot accept this.	me ko lee BaH aa yee

⁶⁵ *African Philosophy: An Anthology*. Exe, Emmanuel Chukwudi. "Yoruba Philosophy [p. 139]." 2004. Blackwell Publishing. http://books.google.com/books?id=KUjmiQIvs-UC&pg=RA4-PT30&lpg=RA4-PT30&dq=yoruba+hospitality&source=web&ots=D87Pn-VU6u&sig=tVuOq93_rlTgLTIXTK66RcZTCsM

Food and Eating Habits

When dining with a Yoruba family, the host will seat each individual around a low table. A wash basin, brought to the table if the family is Muslim, is used to clean the hands prior to eating. If the table is void of utensils, the proper way to eat is using the right hand, making the pre-meal washing important. Food may be brought out on a large communal platter, from which each person will serve themselves. Everyone will then wait until the eldest person begins to eat, even if told to do otherwise. Finishing everything on the plate is a sign that one is still hungry and would like more food. One should leave some food on the plate to show that one is too full to finish.



© B. Kemmler / YMCA Ibadan
Dining at the café

Exchange 18: This food is very good.

Soldier:	This food is very good.	ohn Uja yee daHraH Poohpoo
Local:	It's jollof rice.	jaw lo fry se nee

Urban areas are rife with “chop bars,” *bukas* (roadside stalls), and street vendors. Equally ubiquitous are numerous fast food chains and restaurants ranging from traditional Nigerian cuisine to Chinese, Mexican, and American food. Urbanites may invite visitors out to dinner rather than having them come to their home.

Exchange 19: The food tastes so good.

Soldier:	The food tastes so good.	ohn Uja naH don go
Local:	Thank you.	oh shay

The Yoruba share their cuisine with their *orishas*, making ritual dishes using each god's favorite food. *Gbegiri*, a black eyed bean soup, and *oka*, yam flour pudding, are favored by Sango. These dishes, however, are not reserved solely for the gods; they are used to remind people of the presence of *orishas* in their daily life.⁶⁶

Exchange 20: What is the name of this dish?

Soldier:	What is the name of this dish?	key nee ohrooko ohn Uja yee?
Local:	This is àmàlà.	aHmala nee

⁶⁶ *Yoruba Culture: A Philosophical Account*. Abimbola, Kola. “The Value of Practices and Beliefs [p.98].” 2006. Birmingham, UK: Iroko Academic Publishers. <http://books.google.com/books?id=4G7Xv-wapEMC&pg=PA98&lpg=PA98&dq=yoruba+cuisine&source=web&ots=HBzjIB0Qw-&sig=Fv5sFYXeioZGM-4uno3u9MNs6IQ#PPA98,M1>



© Mike Blyth
Sharing cassava dumplings

Cassava dumplings, *gari*, as well as mashed cassava, yams and rice make up the staples of the Yoruba diet. *Amala*, a traditional Yoruban dish often served with soup, is a paste made by mixing dried yam powder with boiling water. Peppery stews or soups, made with goat, beef, fish or other bush meat and vegetables, are eaten with the pounded yams or dumplings.⁶⁷ The recipes for traditional dishes such as pepper beef stew, *obe* (soup), or *jollof* are passed on

orally from mother to daughter. *Jollof* rice, popular throughout Nigeria, always contains rice, oil, spices, MSG, and meat.

Exchange 21: What ingredients are used to make (insert common national dish)?

Soldier:	What ingredients are used to make jollof rice?	key nee woH fee shay jawlof raysee yee?
Local:	Rice, oil, pepper, salt, butter, spice, MSG, and meat.	iraysee, eePoh, ata, eeyou, bota, koree, magee aHtee il

Weddings

Traditionally, marriages in Yorubaland were arranged by the parents. Today, however, couples may choose their partner, but often still follow the traditional steps towards a union. Marriage ceremonies of Christians, Muslims, and Animists⁶⁸ differ, although they are all recognized as legally binding in Nigeria. Marriage between men and women of different faiths is common in urban areas, although Yorubans in rural areas tend to marry within their religion.

Exchange 22: Congratulations on your wedding!

Soldier:	Congratulations on your wedding!	koo ohreyrey BayaHwo!
Local:	We are honored you could attend.	oh yeaH waH see be oh sey waH

The traditional Yoruba wedding consists of two parts: the introduction and the engagement. During the introduction ceremony, an *olopa iduro* (standing policeman) and an *olopaijoko* (sitting policeman) introduce the two families and make the man's wishes known.⁶⁹ It is at this introduction that the dowry, *owo ori iyawo*, is offered to the bride. The woman's family answers with a letter of acceptance, and the date for the engagement ceremony is chosen. The second part,



© Bennet Summers
Couple at their wedding

⁶⁷ African Foods. "Nigerian Foods." <http://www.africanfoods.co.uk/nigerian-foods.html>

⁶⁸ Animism: A folk religion that predates major organized world religions and views inanimate objects like trees and stones with spiritual values.

⁶⁹ University of Texas. Adejola, Gabriel O. "Traditional Marriage – Igbeyawo Ibile." 2004. <http://www.utexas.edu/conferences/africa/2004/database/adejola.html>

the engagement, represents the marriage ceremony for the couple. This is celebrated with food, family, and friends.

Exchange 23: I wish you both happiness.

Soldier:	I wish you both happiness.	key aHyou kU fU a yEn may ja jee
Local:	We are honored.	ikwa aHyeaH see waH

Funerals

The Yoruba people, regardless of their religious persuasion, do not view death as the end of life. Instead, they see it as the beginning of the journey to the ancestral world. Therefore, there are numerous funeral rituals and traditions that must be observed to ensure a safe and honorable passage of the deceased into the afterlife. The amount of funerary celebration increases with age. If the deceased was a child, a funeral may not be held. However, if the person was old enough to have children, a funeral would allow those children to celebrate their parent’s life.⁷⁰ The most elaborate funerals are reserved for those who have died of very old age.

It is important for people to offer condolences to those who experienced a death in the family. Not doing so will show an unsympathetic attitude and will lead to feelings of distrust.

Exchange 24: I would like to give my condolences to you and your family.

Soldier:	I would like to give my condolences to you and your family.	ikoo oray neeya
Local:	Thank you.	a shay

Isinku

The most formal funeral in Yoruba society is the *isinku*, a funeral reserved for those who have died of old age. This week-long funeral is very expensive and involves detailed planning on the family’s part. Although this formal occasion can occur immediately following the burial, the amount of planning and money needed may push the event up to a year after the death. During the *isinku*, numerous rituals are performed in order to ensure the deceased’s spirit enters the ancestral realm.⁷¹ The first day, *ojo isinku*, is a day of play and dance in remembrance of the deceased. The amount of celebration exemplifies the importance of



© Amara U / flickr.com
Celebration of life

⁷⁰ Iowa State University. “Cultural Information: Nigeria.” No date.
<http://www.public.iastate.edu/~stdtcouns/CultureInformation2.html>

⁷¹ *Indigenous Religions: A Companion*. Harvey, Graham. “The Ontological Journey [p.135].” 2000. New York: Continuum.
http://books.google.com/books?id=aAvB4m7lFhAC&pg=PA135&lpg=PA135&dq=isinku&source=web&ots=ri0r0r16-U&sig=pXzd_WWV4ELbQRFPP56Tv21Psn8#PPP1,M1

the deceased and the influence he or she had on others during life.⁷² For Muslims, this contradicts the Islamic preference for modest funerals. Here, ancient African beliefs about the need for a proper send-off to the afterlife take precedence. Lavish funerals reflect the importance of “spiritual currency,” which is counted by the number of attendees who have made prayers on behalf of the deceased.⁷³

Exchange 25: Please be strong.

Soldier:	Please be strong.	ima shay row new
Local:	We will try.	aH Bee ya jew

Burials

All corpses are buried, regardless of religion, as it is a central belief that one’s body must be returned to the earth. Although a large funeral may not be held for weeks or months following the death of a family member, the burial takes place in the days after the death. Muslims are buried within 24 hours of death, following a washing of the body and a *janaza*, or funeral prayer. Christian burials may take place a few days later, depending on when the family of the deceased can arrive.⁷⁴ In addition to a difference in timelines, the direction of the grave differs depending on religion. Muslims are buried with their heads facing Mecca, while men of other religions are buried with their head facing the rising sun in the east. Women are buried facing west toward the setting sun.⁷⁵

Non-Religious Holidays

Egungun Festival

The Egungun represents the collective spirits of the ancestors who are remembered for their role in daily life. Each year, every town has a festival celebrating the Egungun. Masked men swathed from head-to-toe in colorful, fabric robes embody the Egungun and make their way through town. During this time, the Egungun dancers perform for neighbors, friends, and relatives and offer their blessings.



© Munir Squires
Masquerade costume

Eyo Festival

Also known as the *Adamu-Orisa*, the Eyo Festival is a celebration local to Lagos. The date for the festivities is set by tribal leaders. Often the Eyo Festival is observed when a local chief is buried or the chief’s family is celebrating a birth. As such, Eyo is not an annual occasion, nor does it occur on a specific date. However, the celebration lasts a week and always ends on a Sunday. During this

⁷² Saint Michael’s University. “To the Grave and Beyond: Yoruba.” No date. <http://academics.smcvt.edu/africanart/kristen/yoruba.htm>

⁷³ BBC News, International Edition. “Advice for Cheaper Funerals.” 4 December 2003. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3288891.stm>

⁷⁴ Iowa State University. “Cultural Information: Nigeria.” No date. <http://www.public.iastate.edu/~stdtcouns/CultureInformation2.html>

⁷⁵ Every Culture. “Nigeria.” 2007. <http://www.everyculture.com/Ma-Ni/Nigeria.html>

time, the main road in Lagos is closed for a so-called masquerade, a parade of people dressed in white. The parade participants wear large hats, but no masks.

Exchange 26: Will you be celebrating (insert local festival)?

Soldier:	Will you be celebrating Eyo?	shay oh ma shay ordUy you?
Local:	Yes!	banee!

FGM

Prevalent throughout Nigeria, female genital mutilation (FGM) continues to be carried out by the Yoruba. One estimate finds over 60% of Yoruba females have undergone this procedure in varying degrees of severity.⁷⁶ Cutting is seen as a way to curb sexual desire in women. Among the Yoruba, is often done when girls are around the age of two. As there is no national law banning this practice, it is not illegal unless the state government decries it. However, education efforts by the Ministry of Health and women’s organizations have brought about a decline of FGM in Yorubaland.⁷⁷

Body Markings

Body markings are prevalent in traditional Yoruba society either as tattoos or incisions that leave visible scars. These status symbols represent sexuality, spirituality, and strength for both men and women.⁷⁸ In addition, the designs identify lineage, social standing, and tribal affiliation. Scarification on women symbolizes courage and the ability to endure the pain of childbirth. A woman without scars is viewed as weak and without character.⁷⁹ A dark pigment is often rubbed into the incisions to create *kolo*, or intricate designs on the hands, back, abdomen, legs, or face. Although one may see visible scars on older people, this practice is declining in urban areas.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Plews, Arthur. “From the Statehouse to the Marketplace: Fighting FGM/C on All Fronts in Nigeria.” 01 August 2007. <http://www.unfpa.org/news/news.cfm?ID=1010>

⁷⁷ Ingentaconnect. *Population Research and Policy Review*, Vol. 19 No. 3. Caldwell, J.C. and I.O. Orubuloye, P. Caldwell. “Female Genital Mutilation: Conditions of Decline.” June 2000. http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/klu/popu/2000/00000019/00000003/00262282#aff_2

⁷⁸ University of Georgia. Ojo, Akinloye Ed. “Yoruba Omo Oduduwa.” 1999. <http://www.uga.edu/aflang/yoruba/oduduwa.htm>

⁷⁹ Pitt Rivers Museum. “Body Art Scarification.” 2002. http://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/pdf/scarification_web.pdf

⁸⁰ Washington Post. Houeld, Katherine. Tradition of Scarification Begins to Fade in Nigeria.” 24 June 2007. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/06/23/AR2007062301319.html>

Dos and Don'ts

Do bring gifts of fruit or candy to someone's home.

Do inquire about one's family during a conversation.

Do address people using their title.

Do maintain eye contact when in conversation.

Don't pass or accept items with the left hand only.

Don't shake hands with village elders; it is considered disrespectful.

Don't step over someone's outstretched legs; it is bad luck.

Don't beckon someone with a curved finger.

Don't use the "hand push" gesture, which is done by holding one's hand forward at shoulder-level with fingers extended.

Don't take photographs of people without permission.

Chapter 4 Urban Life

Urbanization Issues

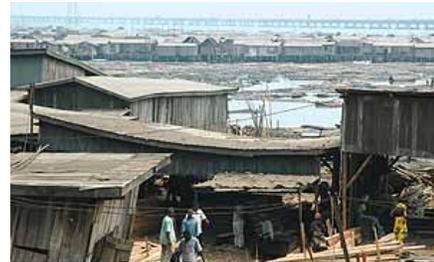
While most urban centers across Africa are a result of British colonization, urban centers in Nigeria, such as Lagos and Ibadan, were populated prior to British arrival. Prior to independence, city-states in Yorubaland fought for control of neighboring territories. During the conflicts, war camps developed into large cities. Lagos' continual growth resulted from coastal trade with European ships, which attracted Nigerians from the North and East. The construction of the railroad from Lagos to inland cities also spurred migration from other parts of Nigeria.⁸¹

Following the 1970s oil boom, Nigeria's cities, including those in Yorubaland, experienced growth as the population became increasingly urbanized.⁸² About 40% of Nigeria's population now lives in cities.⁸³ Lagos has continued to grow despite the move of the capital to Abuja, but its size has brought about urban issues not planned for. Today, Lagos is ranked the third-worst large city in the world to live in, according to the Economist.⁸⁴ Crime is common in Nigeria's large urban areas, prompting the U.S. State Department to label the crime level as critical. Foreigners are often the targets of carjacking, assaults, pick-pocketing, and muggings.⁸⁵

Today, Lagos is a melting pot—home to Yorubans, Hausa, Fulanis, and Igbos. The Hausa and Fulani reside in an area known as *Sabo*. Igbos, who are often traders, live in the areas where they work—near markets and shopping centers. Although there are ethnic enclaves in Lagos, residents interact with those from other tribal backgrounds on a regular basis. Ethnic tensions in other parts of the country can affect these interactions, however, and violence may ensue as people feel forced to take sides.

Slums

Both Lagos and Ibadan are home to large numbers of people, and as the influx of people increases, the slum population grows. Currently, two thirds of the residents of Lagos live in one of many slums. One of these slum areas is Makoko, a neighborhood of stilt houses built above Lagos Lagoon. In the cramped makeshift housing here, access to clean water, electricity, and proper waste disposal is nearly non-existent. If electricity extends out to a home, its



© Bennet Summers
Lagos shanty town

⁸¹ Library of Congress. A Country Study: Nigeria. "Historical Setting." June 1991. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/ngtoc.html>

⁸² Country Studies. "Nigeria: Urbanization." <http://countrystudies.us/nigeria/48.htm>

⁸³ University of Northern Iowa. Geographic Alliance of Iowa. Nigeria Background Information. "Human Settlements." No date. <http://www.uni.edu/gai/Nigeria/Background/Standard12.html>

⁸⁴ Allianz Knowledge Partnership. Valdis Wish, Ed. "The Future is Urban." 5 October 2007. http://knowledge.allianz.com/en/globalissues/demographic_change/urbanization/urbanization_cities.html

⁸⁵ Bureau of Consular Affairs. U.S. State Department. "International Travel Information. Nigeria." April 16, 2007. http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_987.html

reliability is spotty at best. Sewage systems are almost always lacking. As a result, waste is disposed of in the surrounding water or in areas adjacent to living quarters.⁸⁶

Area Boys

Area Boys, as they are known locally, are gangs who have roamed the streets of Lagos since the 1980s. Consisting of young men, many of whom are addicted to drugs and in search of money, the Area Boys wander the streets and marketplaces. Often armed with guns, they demand “taxes” from vendors and buyers in the markets. They bully people stuck in cars during traffic slowdowns until they receive a “donation.”⁸⁷ They may claim ownership of a strip of road or parking lot and charge a fee to vendors or people searching for a parking space. In addition to collecting money for nothing, Area Boys may also perform security services or act as hired thugs. Although clashes between Area Boys and police or soldiers have occurred, police frequently ignore the gangs as they go about their illicit daily activities.

Health Care

There is a three-tier system of health care in place throughout Yoruban Nigeria. The lowest level of care available to the poor in urban areas comes from licensed state health care providers and *onisegun* (traditional healers). These healers employ over-the-counter medicines as well as homemade herbal remedies. In treating patients who can afford private fees, doctors themselves often take a combined approach, blending the traditional with the modern in order to encourage people to seek medical advice. Both prescription drugs and traditional medicines can be found in the urban markets, while it is common to see “injectionists” offering a variety of shots in their market stalls.⁸⁸



© Brian Johnson
Litter-lined street in Lagos

Exchange 27: Do you know what is wrong?

Soldier:	Do you know what is wrong?	shay oh mon ko to day?
Local:	No.	oh tee

The lowest level of health care gives citizens of Yorubaland access to primary services in both public and private clinics. Today, Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) with basic training in midwifery and delivery take the place of Yoruban midwives during pre-and post-natal care. The TBA offers primary health care geared toward fertility and basic childcare. Immunization, educational programs, and private clinics are also part of the lowest level of state-sponsored healthcare.

⁸⁶ IRIN News. “Nigeria: Lagos, the Mega-City of Slums.” 5 September 2006.

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=60811>

⁸⁷ News from Africa. IRIN. “Area Boys – A Growing Menace on the Streets of Lagos.” 14 July 2005.

http://www.newsfromafrica.org/newsfromafrica/articles/art_10372.html

⁸⁸ *Encyclopedia of Medical Anthropology*. Ember, Carol and Melvin Ember, Eds. “Yoruba: Medical Practitioners [p. 1032].” 2004. Springer.

http://books.google.com/books?id=r50_mOSXlr0C&pg=PA1032&lpg=PA1032&dq=health+yorubaland&source=web&ots=xwFoAB5N4S&sig=I97T8Ny1VJdtcBqzhKy81qkiiiI&hl=en#PPA545,M1

Exchange 28: Is the doctor in?

Soldier:	Is Dr. Adéníyì in, sir?	ijaw wo saH, shay do keyta aHdayneeyee waHn lee?
Local:	No.	oh tee

Government and private hospitals found in cities and large towns form the second level of state-sponsored healthcare. Services found at this level include outpatient and inpatient procedures, laboratory testing, and rehabilitation. Specialized hospitals provide the third level of health care, including disease-specific care. They are found in both Lagos and Ibadan.⁸⁹

Exchange 29: Is there a hospital nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a hospital nearby?	shay lee wo so waH nee to see?
Local:	Yes, in the center of town.	banee, la ree lo

Sanitation

Sanitation, or the lack thereof, in the crowded areas of Lagos and Ibadan is an issue that raises health concerns for many. The risk of disease caused by contaminated water or polluted soil, including typhoid fever, diarrhea, or Lassa fever, is high.⁹⁰ In addition, the sharp increase in population has overwhelmed the waste removal systems run by the government. Sewage treatment facilities that once worked well are now largely non-functioning. In order to combat the waste found on the streets, Lagos State has implemented “Sanitation Day,” which occurs on the last Saturday of every month. The people of Lagos sweep the streets and collect trash to help unblock gutters and storm drains.⁹¹

Informal Economy

The informal economy of Yorubaland is created by people who work outside of the taxable state economy. It provides consumer goods and services at lower prices. What once consisted of handicraft makers and small trade now employs approximately half of the urban work force, including street vendors, some bus drivers, and numerous shop owners.⁹² With the influx of workers into Lagos from rural areas, the informal economy continues to grow, assimilating those who were unable to find traditional jobs.



© Gatto Giallo
Typical slow-down in Lagos

⁸⁹ Motherland Nigeria. “Healthcare.” No date. <http://www.motherlandnigeria.com/health.html>

⁹⁰ CIA World Factbook. “Nigeria.” 6 March 2008. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html>

⁹¹ Voice of America. Simpson, Sarah. “Africa Begins Banning Plastic Bags in Bid to Tackle Waste Problem.” 03 December 2007. <http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2007-12/2007-12-03-voa27.cfm?CFID=30077481&CFTOKEN=61496794>

⁹² Global Urban Development Magazine. Nwaka, Geoffrey. “The Urban Informal Sector in Nigeria: Towards Economic Development, Environmental Health, and Social Harmony.” May 2005. <http://www.globalurban.org/Issue1PIMag05/NWAKA%20article.htm>

Street Vendors

Street vendors are rampant in Lagos, where they sell their wares to those waiting in the so-called “go slows” or traffic jams, to those relaxing on the beach, or to people walking around town. When purchasing something from these street vendors, the price of the item is much lower than those offered in shops.⁹³

Exchange 30: Please, buy something from me.

Local:	Please, buy something from me.	ja wa, raH kon fU me
Soldier:	Sorry, I have no money left.	ma beenew, me ko lo wo mo

Beggars

Beggars, whether elderly, middle-aged, young, or disabled, can be found on every corner of urban Yorubaland. Although giving money to a beggar is common, it may result in a swarm of beggars coming forward. It is better to politely, yet firmly, decline to give them money.

Exchange 31: Give me money

Local:	Give me money	fU me lo wo
Soldier:	I don't have any.	me ko lo wo

Education and Schools in Cities

State-run and private schools in Lagos and throughout Yorubaland run from January to December in a 6-3-3-4 system. Six years of primary school are followed by three years each of junior secondary and secondary school and four years of university. Lagos and Ibadan are home to state-sponsored and private higher and vocational education. Among them are Lagos City Computer College (private) and Lagos State University (state). Ibadan has the additional prestige

of being home to the first university in Nigeria. University students wishing to pursue a career in government or big business in Nigeria are required by the government to volunteer their services in the National Youth Service Corp for a year. This scheme was initiated in 1973. During this service year, graduates perform community service in a state other than their own, working in health, educational, or environmental services.⁹⁴



⁹³ Washington Times Special International Report. Nigeria. “Encouraging Formal Economic Participation.”. 30 September 1999. <http://www.internationalreports.com/africa/99/nigeria/36.html>

⁹⁴ Innovations in Civic Participation. “Country Profile: Nigeria.” No date. <http://www.icip.org/index.php?tg=articles&idx=Print&topics=198&article=380>

Telecommunications

Mobile phone use trumps that of landline phones almost 20 to 1. The land-based telephone network is in need of modernization. In 2006, landlines served 1.688 million people, while mobile phone services were used by 32.3 million people.⁹⁵ Phone service throughout Nigeria can be spotty at best, and calls must often be tried several times before they go through.⁹⁶

Exchange 32: What is your telephone number?

Soldier:	What is your telephone number?	key nee numbaH teleefono rey?
Local:	My phone number is 805-234-7896	numbaH teleefon me nee eight oh five two three four seven eight nine six (805-234-7896)

Most people have multiple cell phones, each with a different carrier in order to ensure constant service. Nigerian cell phone companies offer phone rental schemes that permit customers to pre-purchase time. Although such calls may end abruptly, they are cheaper than making calls using a mobile plan.⁹⁷

Mobile phone vendors may allow people to use their phones for a small fee. In addition, call *cabines*,

where phone calls can be placed for a small fee, are found on most urban streets. This enables low-income workers to purchase small increments of phone time to call relatives in their native villages.



© Raffaele Bello
Nigerian using mobile phone

Exchange 33: May I use your phone?

Soldier:	May I use your phone?	shay mo lee low fono rey?
Local:	Sure.	banee

Restaurants

Entertaining, especially in Lagos, often takes place at restaurants, which range in type from traditional Nigerian to European and Asian. In addition to sit-down restaurants, self-service cafes are found in department stores. Bars or cocktail lounges can be found in clubs or large hotels. Street vendors and “chop bars” are located in most large urban areas. Fast food restaurants such as Mr. Biggs and Tastee Fried Chicken (TFC) serve Nigerian specialties, including meat pies and *jollof* rice, instead of burgers or fries.⁹⁸

Ibadan is home to *bukas*, which are usually nothing more than a tin-roofed shack serving local dishes like *amala* (black pudding) or *gbegiri* (bean soup). Caution is advised

⁹⁵ CIA World Factbook. “Nigeria.” 6 March 2008. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html>

⁹⁶ Motherland Nigeria. “Telephone.” c.1998–2002. <http://www.motherlandnigeria.com/telephone.html>

⁹⁷ CNN. Transcripts. “Inside Africa: Cell Phones in Africa.” Aired 8 March 2008. http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0803/08/i_if.01.html

⁹⁸ CollegeHandout.com. Nworah, Uche. “Nigerian Fast Food Brands.” No date. http://www.collegehandouts.com/files/Nigerian_Fast_Food_Brands.pdf

however: a recent health study of street vendors operating food stalls found that 97% of them were infected with one or more transmissible parasites.⁹⁹ Restaurants are considered safer. Dining out in Ibadan, however, is reserved only for those times when making food is not convenient. Restaurants are limited in number although hotels commonly offer a dining option.¹⁰⁰

Business Dining

Because business meetings are often long, refreshments such as water, tea, coffee, or even beer are served. Frequently business extends into the lunch hours, 1 pm to 3 pm. It is not uncommon for acquaintances of the host to join in uninvited which may require further business discussion to be postponed.

Exchange 34: May I have a glass of water?

Soldier:	May I have a glass of water?	shay mo lee ree oh me ko Pooh ko moo?
Local:	Yes, right away.	banee, oh yaH

Ordering

Business in Nigeria does not start until after breakfast, which usually consists of leftovers or *dodo* (fried plantains) or rice and mangos. Many Yorubans also eat *ogi*, or stewed soybeans, for breakfast. When looking for a quick place to eat, the words “ready-to-eat” will indicate prepared food. “Food-isn’t-ready” refers to food that must be cooked to order.

Exchange 35: Are you still serving breakfast?

Soldier:	Are you still serving breakfast?	shay in ta ohn Uja aHraw?
Local:	Yes.	banee

Plantain and pepper soup, which can be found traditional Nigerian restaurants, is a national specialty. *Efo*, a vegetable soup, is often served alongside pounded yam. Soup in Nigeria closely resembles stew, and is thick with vegetables and meat.

Exchange 36: I’d like some hot soup.

Soldier:	I’d like some hot soup.	mo fay oo bay BooBono
Local:	Sure.	mo tee Bo

⁹⁹ Department of Biological Sciences, University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, Nigeria. Idowu, O.A. and Rowland, S.A. “Oral fecal parasites and personal hygiene of food handlers in Abeokuta, Nigeria” September 2006. <http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?artid=1831884>

¹⁰⁰ World 66 Travel Guide. “Ibadan: Eating Out.” No date. <http://www.world66.com/africa/nigeria/ibadan/eatingout>

National dishes include skewered liver and beef, *suya*, and spiced dried meat, *kilishi*, as well as bush meat, such as antelope, which are considered delicacies. Both *amala*, a yam-based dish, and *eba*, a cassava-based dish, are served alongside meat dishes.



© Raffaele Bello
Suya

Exchange 37: What type of meat is this?

Soldier:	What type of meat is this?	iro ron wo nee yee?
Local:	Lamb.	eron aHBo

Fruit, such as coconut, papaya, and *agbalumó* (a Nigerian fruit) is often served following the main course. *Shuka shuka* (coconut balls), caramelized bananas, and *kulikuli* (peanut balls) are other popular sweet snacks or desserts. Hot and spicy *pepe supu* (pepper soup) may also be served at the end of the meal.

Exchange 38: Do you have a dessert?

Soldier:	Do you have a dessert?	shay a new oh hU iPano?
Local:	Yes, we have pepper soup.	banee, PehPeh su Pooh waH

Popular drinks that can be found at restaurants, cafes, and bars include soda, tea, coffee, palm wine, beer, and spirits. Alcoholic beverages, which are prohibited in the North due to Shari’a, are available in Yorubaland. Palm wine, an alcoholic beverage, is made from the juice of palm trees. Beer, such as Burukuta (BKT) and Guinness, is often locally brewed and bottled.

Exchange 39: I would like coffee or tea.

Soldier:	I would like coffee or tea.	mo fay koffee tabee tee
Local:	Sure.	mo tee Bo

Getting the bill

Splitting a bill or “going Dutch” are not familiar concepts among Yorubans. The person who invited others out is the host and pays the bill. If foreigners wish to dine together and share the cost, they would be well advised to pool their money prior to entering the bar or restaurant and to designate one person to pay the bill.

Exchange 40: Put this all in one bill.

Soldier:	Put this all in one bill.	shay ka fee BoBo aa yee shay iko
Local:	Okay.	mo tee Bo

Some restaurants may add a service charge to the bill. If this is not included, however, tipping 10% is considered acceptable, although is not a necessity. It is advisable to always carry cash, as most restaurants do not accept credit cards. In addition, stories of fraudulent charges and stolen credit cards are rampant, making credit card use risky.

Exchange 41: Can I have my total bill, please?

Soldier:	Can I have my total bill, please?	shay mo lee mo BoBo oh wo me?
Local:	Yes, of course.	banee, ka

Traditionally, dining is done using the right hand in place of utensils. Even soups are eaten using a cupped **right** hand. At Yoruban homes, a water-filled bowl and towel used to clean hands are passed around prior to the meal. At restaurants, the restroom should be used to wash hands prior to eating.

Exchange 42: Where is your restroom?

Soldier:	Where is your restroom?	iboo nee lee yaH Bay waH?
Local:	That room to your left, over there.	yaHraH tee oh waH nee aH Pa oh see ray, nee ba yee

Marketplace

For those interested in shopping, Lagos is full of supermarkets, specialty shops, artisan shops, and street vendors. Sellers and street vendors will only accept cash and most will not accept anything other than the naira, the Nigerian currency. Exchanging money anywhere other than at major banks or hotels is illegal and may lead to arrest.

Exchange 43: Do you accept U.S. currency?

Soldier:	Do you accept U.S. currency?	shay in Ba oh wo aHmareekaH?
Local:	No we only accept nairas.	oh tee, naH iraH nee ka lan Ba

Haggling with the vendors is expected, but should not be attempted unless a customer knows the true market value of the item. This can be difficult when it comes to carpets and artisan products. Merchants frequently inflate the value of their products by as much as 200%, hoping to get half that amount. Most importantly, neither the seller nor the buyer should maneuver themselves into a bargaining corner.

Exchange 44: Can you give me change for this?

Soldier:	Can you give me change for this?	shay oh lee fU me nee chain gee fU aa yee?
Local:	No.	oh tee

It is not uncommon for a seller to offer his wares to different customers at different prices. This underscores the importance of knowing the market value before attempting to bargain at the market. In Lagos, as everywhere else, the rule of the market place is “caveat emptor,” let the buyer beware.



© Gatto Giallo
Haggling at the market

Exchange 45: Can I buy a carpet with this much money?

Soldier:	Can I buy a carpet with this much money?	shay oh wo yee aH to laatee raH kapey tee?
Local:	No.	oh tee

Large open air markets in Lagos can be found outside of the Eko Hotel, the Federal Palace, and Lekki Square Market, which is much more crowded than the others. Victoria Island and Alowowo Road are home to some upscale galleries that carry higher-priced items.

Exchange 46: Is the market nearby?

Soldier:	Is the market nearby?	shay oja waH nee to see?
Local:	Yes, over there on the right.	banee, nee ba yee, nee aHPa oo tU



© Gatto Giallo
Bananas for sale in Lagos

Markets and shops are typically open from 8 am to 5 pm Monday through Saturday, although those run by Muslims may be closed on Fridays.¹⁰¹ Roadside stalls and street vendors may operate at varying hours throughout the day and frequently change their venue to target the movement of buyers or traffic.

Exchange 47: How much longer will you be here?

Soldier:	How much longer will you be here?	iBawo nee oh ma waH nee bee dee?
Local:	Three more hours.	oh koo waH katee mey ta

Wood figurines and traditional woodcarving flourish all over southern Nigeria. Other handicraft items include bronze work, ivory carving, hand painted cloth known as *batik*, and painted masks.

Exchange 48: Do you sell wood figurines?

Soldier:	Do you sell carved wood figurines?	shay in ta aH wo aa rey?
Local:	Yes.	banee

Export of antiques purchased in the country, such as ritual carvings in ivory, is allowed and legal only with an export certificate. These are available from the Department of Antiquities or the curator of the National Museum in Jos.¹⁰²

Exchange 49: Do you have any more of these?

Soldier:	Do you have any more of these?	shay oh shay koo?
Local:	No.	oh tee

¹⁰¹ What's on When. "Lagos: Shop." 2008.

http://www.whatsonwhen.com/sisp/index.htm?fx=destination&loc_id=158158&sub_section=Shop

¹⁰² Online Nigeria. Ekpenyong, A.J.U. "Useful Information for the Foreign Visitor." c.1998–2008.

<http://www.onlinenigeria.com/tours/visitorGuide.asp>

Buyers may ask to view an item before purchasing to determine if they would like to buy it. Once the price is agreed upon, however, it is considered extremely rude to walk away without completing the transaction.

Exchange 50: May I examine this close up?

Soldier:	May I examine this close up?	shay mo lee wo daHdaH?
Local:	Yes.	banee

Urban Traffic & Transportation

During the 1970s and 1980s, roads throughout Nigeria were upgraded, but since then, the infrastructure has fallen into disrepair. In addition to deteriorating roads and a lack of safety standards, an increase in vehicles has led to traffic congestions commonly referred to as “go slows.”¹⁰³ The few roads existent in Ibadan are further plagued by potholes and a lack of speed limits. There are virtually no warning signs alerting drivers to intersections, curves or other problems.



Drivers are known to enter one-way streets the wrong way or even drive down the drainage ditches to avoid “go slows”. The absence of effective traffic controls, enforcement of motor vehicle codes, and careless driving in Lagos make driving hazardous. During periods of peak traffic, street vendors ply their wares to those waiting in their cars, thereby creating further traffic problems.

Exchange 51: Is there a gas station nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a gas station nearby?	shay ilee Poh waH nee to see?
Local:	Yes.	banee

Lacking a system of motor vehicle inspections, Lagos is now filled with many old and mechanically unsound cars. Spare parts are often not be available and not all of those who claim to be mechanics are able to properly repair cars. Failing brakes and substandard repairs have led to numerous accidents on city streets.¹⁰⁴

Exchange 52: Is there a good auto mechanic nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a good auto mechanic nearby?	shay makanee kee tee oh daHraH waH nee to see?
Local:	Yes.	banee

¹⁰³ Encyclopædia Britannica. “Nigeria.” 2008. <http://www.britannica.com/bps/topic/414840/Nigeria#tab=active~checked%2Citems~checked%3E%2Fbps%2Ftopic%2F414840%2FNigeria&title=Nigeria%20--%20Britannica%20Online%20Encyclopedia>

¹⁰⁴ Encyclopedia.com. New Internationalist. Oguine, Ike. “Suffering and Smiling: Ike Oguine Sits in a Lagos Traffic Jam and Ponders on the Way the Private Automobile Isn’t Getting Anyone Anywhere.” 01 March 2002. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G1-84306139.html>

Lagos Island, the center of the metropolis, is 22 km (13.6 mi) from Lagos International Airport. In addition, the domestic Lagos Airport is 10 km (6.2 mi) from the city and provides service to most major Nigerian cities. However, Lagos and Ibadan are not connected by plane.¹⁰⁵

Exchange 53: Which road leads to the airport?

Soldier:	Which road leads to the airport?	ona wo low law see boo do oko baloo?
Local:	The road heading east.	ona iwa oo no

Lagos lacks tram or streetcar transportation, but the mainland station north of the island does offer services to inland cities. Railroads were once the main mode of transportation. An expansion of the rail system in the 1990s increased the number of lines connecting Lagos to other cities in Yorubaland.¹⁰⁶

Exchange 54: Is there a train station nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a train station nearby?	shay aHgo oko oh jew irE waH nee to see?
Local:	No.	oh tee

Minibuses, which are painted yellow with blue stripes, drive on specific routes around Lagos. Known locally as *molues*, these old Volkswagens are the cheapest way to get around the city. Bus conductors often reach out and offer a hand to a waiting passenger to help them onboard as the bus is still moving. However, the legal occupancy of 44 passengers is frequently ignored. Consequently, overcrowded buses are a common sight. Thieves and pick-pockets thrive on such conditions, so foreigners do well to avoid public buses.¹⁰⁷



Exchange 55: Will the bus be here soon?

Soldier:	Will the bus be here soon?	shay bo see ma day lay Peh?
Local:	Yes.	banee

Taxis are considered the safest way to travel and can be found throughout the greater urban area, at hotels, and at the airport.¹⁰⁸ Negotiating the fare is best accomplished prior

¹⁰⁵ Travel.Mapsof World.com “Transportation in Ibadan.” <http://travel.mapsofworld.com/nigeria/ibadan-travel/transportation-in-ibadan.html>

¹⁰⁶ Encyclopædia Britannica. “Nigeria.” 2008. <http://www.britannica.com/bps/topic/414840/Nigeria#tab=active~checked%2Citems~checked%3E%2Fbps%2Ftopic%2F414840%2FNigeria&title=Nigeria%20--%20Britannica%20Online%20Encyclopedia>

¹⁰⁷ BBC News. Ibagare, Eniwoke. “On the Buses in Lagos.” 28 February 2001. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/1186572.stm>

¹⁰⁸ iExplore. “Lagos Murtala Muhammed International Airport Travel Guide.” No date. <http://www.iexplore.com/airportguides/Nigeria/LOS/Overview>

to entering the *danfo*, as the taxis are called. Licensed cabs are painted yellow, while unlicensed taxis, called *kabukahus*, are unpainted.

Exchange 56: Where can I get a cab?

Soldier:	Where can I get a cab?	iboo nee mo tee lee ree taakey see?
Local:	Over there.	nee ba yee

Okadas, or motorcycle taxis, are the quickest way to get around. In 2006, however, a law banning them from operating at night was enforced.¹⁰⁹ In addition to automobiles, private boats and public ferries take people to and from Lagos Island to the mainland.

Exchange 57: Can you take me there?

Soldier:	Can you take me there?	shay oh lee Bay me day lee?
Local:	Yes, I can.	banee, ma aBee rey

Car rental agencies can be found at the airport and most major hotels, but hiring a driver is highly recommended. International car agencies often include drivers in their rental agreements.¹¹⁰ In addition to the dangers faced by inexperienced drivers when navigating the roads through urban Yorubaland, international driving permits are not recognized.¹¹¹

Exchange 58: Where can I rent a car?

Soldier:	Where can I rent a car?	iboo nee mo tee lee rantee oko?
Local:	Downtown.	aHree loo

¹⁰⁹ BBC News. Last, Alex. "Bike Taxi Ban Hits Lagos Commuters." 24 August 2006.
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/5281880.stm>

¹¹⁰ Travel Max. Lonely Planet. "Destination: Lagos, Nigeria." 2007.
http://www.isic.org/sisp/index.htm?fx=destination&loc_id=158158§ion=getting_around

¹¹¹ Bureau of Consular Affairs. U.S. Department of State. International Travel Information. "Nigeria. Country Specific Information." 16 April 2007.
http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_987.html#traffic_safety

Chapter 5 Rural Life

Land Ownership

The concept of individual ownership of land and its legal conveyance to heirs was introduced into Yoruba-speaking areas during the colonial era. The Land Use Decree of 1978 extended this practice to all of Nigeria with the provision that land that is not being occupied or under active cultivation may be confiscated by the government. Property owners can guard against seizure of private land by securing an Occupancy Certificate. The practice of land confiscation has made absentee ownership of rural tracts of land by urban residents more difficult.¹¹²

Rural Economy

Small-scale farming is common in rural Yorubaland. Cultivation of yams, cassava, and other food crops, as well as cash crops including cocoa and *obi* (kola nut), provides families with income. Farming employs 70% of Nigeria's workforce, and owners of small farms utilize 81% of all farmland.¹¹³ What they produce on this land is sold in the nearest urban marketplace, typically by the women in the family. Although the women help with harvesting and selling, they do not farm. While farmers may profit from the land and pass this right to their children, they often do not own it. Ownership is vested in the leader of the community or family group who allocates land to the individual farmers.¹¹⁴ However, the government has the power to seize land or refuse a *certificate of occupancy* to a farmer.



© Mike Blyth
Village farm

Exchange 59: Do you own this land?

Soldier:	Do you own this land?	shay wo low nee lay yee?
Local:	Yes.	banee

Other jobs in the rural economy are based on handicrafts such as metalwork, wood carving and weaving for men. Women also weave and practice pottery making, spinning, and dyeing of cotton.¹¹⁵ With this, women are able to earn their own income.

¹¹² Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. Country Studies. "Nigeria: Land use, Soils, and Land Tenure." June 1991. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/cshome.html>

¹¹³ Oxford Policy Management. "DFID Rural and Urban Development Case Study – Nigeria." June 2004. http://www.passlivelivelihoods.org.uk/site_files%5Cfiles%5Creports%5Cproject_id_167%5CNigeria%20Rural%20Urban%20Change%20Case%20Study_RU0173.pdf

¹¹⁴ University of Georgia. Papers on Yoruba People, Language and Culture. Akinloye Ojo, Ed. "The Historical Economic Structure of Yorubaland." 1999. <http://www.uga.edu/aflang/YORUBA/ODUDUWA.htm>

¹¹⁵ Every Culture. "Yoruba Economy." No date. <http://www.everyculture.com/Africa-Middle-East/Yoruba-Economy.html>

Healthcare

Rural healthcare throughout Nigeria is best characterized as woefully inadequate and badly distributed. The difference between the healthcare in rural areas versus urban areas is often like night and day, mainly due to lacking infrastructure in the villages. In some states, the ratio of hospital beds to people is as low as 1,000 per bed and in others as high as 4,000 per bed. The same imbalance applies to physicians. In Lagos, there are an estimated 2,500 people per doctor, whereas in some rural areas the ratio is as high as 35,000 per physician. As a result, the population frequently resorts to traditional healers, *babalawas*, or to *olorisas* (animist healers). Both rely on herbal cures that were known to tribal ancestors. *Olorisas* invoke supernatural forces to bring about healing.



© Michael J. Tramontana
Patients at a rural health clinic

Exchange 60: Is there a medical clinic nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a medical clinic nearby?	shay lay wo so waH nee to see?
Local:	Yes, over there.	banee, nee ba yee

Midwives and *iya isegun* (female healers) provide services for women and children. Only when a condition is serious enough to warrant medicines that may harm the fertility of the patient will a physician be consulted.¹¹⁶ Recently, mobile clinics have begun serving the outlying areas of the Lagos metropolitan area. In addition, in order to encourage those who cannot afford the price of healthcare, the Lagos State Government has offered the EKO Free Health Mission.¹¹⁷

Exchange 61: My arm is broken, can you help me?

Soldier:	My arm is broken, can you help me?	aPa me tee ko, shay oh lee roo me law wo?
Local:	Yes, I can help you.	banee, mo lee rey ney law wo

Rural Education

Although every child in Nigeria is offered free primary education, attendance is not mandatory, and the number of schools is inadequate. Most rural families try to put at least one child through six years of elementary school and into secondary school. It is estimated that 8 to 10 million school-age children do not attend classes at all despite the Universal Basic Scheme, which was introduced in 1977.

¹¹⁶ *Encyclopedia of Medical Anthropology*. Ember, Carol and Melvin Ember, Eds. "Yoruba: Medical Practitioners [p. 1032]." 2004. New York: Springer.
http://books.google.com/books?id=r50_mOSXlr0C&pg=PA1032&lpg=PA1032&dq=health+yorubaland&source=web&ots=xwFoAB5N4S&sig=I97T8Ny1VJdtcBqzhKy81qkiiiI&hl=en#PPA545,M1

¹¹⁷ All Africa. "Nigeria: Govt Takes Free Health Mission to Ibeju Lekki." 16 March 2008.
<http://allafrica.com/stories/200803171257.html>

Exchange 62: Is there a school nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a school nearby?	shay ilee way waH nee to see?
Local:	Yes.	banee

Rural areas have a poorer infrastructure than urban areas. This limits the available education choices. In addition, socioeconomic factors, as well as gender and cultural issues, play a large role in determining whether a child will attend school or not. Children living in rural areas are more likely to learn the skills needed to farm. Age-based schools, provided by the state or local government in some rural areas, are attended more often by boys than by girls.¹¹⁸ This is reflected in a 15% difference in literacy rate by gender, which is 75.7% for men and 60.6% for women.¹¹⁹ However, the importance of an education, even if not gained by attending school, does influence people in rural areas. Children often do all they can to learn.

Exchange 63: Do your children go to school?

Soldier:	Do your children go to school?	shay aHwoH mo rey law see lay way?
Local:	Yes.	banee

Village Life

Village life in Yorubaland centers on agriculture and attending the markets. Nearly 70% of Yorubans live in farming communities. Following the decline in export crop prices, they have turned to subsistence farming and growing crops that can be sold on the local market. Most still use traditional hand tools to work small plots outside the village. Their homes are often tin-roofed, and their source of water is either a hand pump or a single freestanding water pipe. Many have yet to be connected to the distant national electricity grid. Likewise, village streets are seldom paved.



© pjotter05 / flickr.com
New water pump

In recent years, wealthy urbanites acting as absentee farmers have attempted to buy sizeable chunks of agricultural land near villages. Yet, this remains a risky venture under the Land Use Act, which permits the government to confiscate land without visible tenants.¹²⁰ The village remains an ethnic measure of orientation to many Yorubans who identify with a particular village as their ancestors' home, regardless of where they live or work.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Online Nigeria. "Education in Nigeria." No date. <http://www.onlinenigeria.com/education/index.asp>

¹¹⁹ CIA World Factbook. "Nigeria." 20 March 2008. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html>

¹²⁰ University of Texas. Adetunji, Jacob. "Dual Residence Patterns in a Yoruban Community." 2004. <http://www.utexas.edu/conferences/africa/2004/database/dual.html>

¹²¹ Country Studies. "Nigeria: Urbanization." 1991. <http://countrystudies.us/nigeria/48.htm>

Exchange 64: Do you know this area very well?

Soldier:	Do you know this area very well?	shay oh mo aBeBe yee daHdaH?
Local:	Yes.	banee

Who is in Charge?

Yoruban villages are headed by an *oba*, or king, who oversees all aspects of the community, including shareholding of the land. He is thought to be a direct descendent of the founding *oba* and either inherits the position or replaces the current ruler.¹²²

Exchange 65: Does your leader live here?

Soldier:	Does your leader live here?	shay oh lowree yee Ba nee bee?
Local:	Yes.	banee

Although he maintains his business or continues in his primary profession, the *oba* and his family move into the palace, which is often the physical and cultural center of town. Known as the *aafin*, this compound also houses ancestral shrines, a school house, museum, and guesthouses.¹²³

Exchange 66: Is there lodging nearby?

Soldier:	Is there lodging nearby?	shay ilee toraH waH nee to see?
Local:	Yes.	banee

The position of the *oba* has changed over time. Today, an *oba* is supported by a network of chiefs, businessmen, and political functionaries who have inherited various administrative duties in the community.¹²⁴ The chiefs consist of *eghae* or senior chiefs, *ekule* or secondary chiefs, and *elegbe* or junior chiefs.

In addition to governing Yoruban villages, the *oba* communicates with state governments on behalf of his councils. As a person of honor, he often presides over the many festivals held at the town's *aafin*.



© Ellie / flickr.com
Village elder

Exchange 67: Can you take me to your leader?

Soldier:	Can you take me to your leader?	shay oh lee moo me law see odo oh lowree yee?
Local:	Yes.	banee

¹²² University of Iowa. "Yoruba Information." 03 November 1998.

<http://www.uiowa.edu/~africart/toc/people/yoruba.html>

¹²³ *Mapping Yoruba Networks: Power and Agency in the Making of Transnational Communities*. Clarke, Kamari M. "Mapping Yoruba Networks [p.82]." 2004. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

¹²⁴ Guardian News. Akinnaso, Niyi. "The Ooni in America." No date.
http://www.guardiannewsngr.com/editorial_opinion/article04/200706

Exchange 68: Respected leader, we need your help / advice / opinion.

Soldier:	Respected leader/elder/mayor (pick applicable), we need your help / advice / opinion.	oh lowree, mo jew baH oh, ijaw wo, aH fey ero la wo / ito nee saw no / emoro yee
Local:	Yes.	banee

Gender Roles in Rural Areas

Like other African tribal societies, Yoruba culture is patriarchal. A division of labor within the household, however, allows the family as an economic unit of production to achieve its maximum productive capability. Men and women perform those tasks traditionally associated with their gender. Women are thought to be associated with *ero* or coolness, which is necessary for child rearing. The main male characteristic is *lile*, or toughness. The male is the head of the household and women in the family are subordinate to him.¹²⁵

Exchange 69: Did these people threaten you?

Soldier:	Did these people threaten you?	shay aHwoH nee yaw yee lay ree see yee?
Local:	No.	oh tee

While rural women are not allowed to participate in farming, they are responsible for selling the produce from which they retain a portion of the profit. The idea of a full-time housewife is foreign to Yoruba culture and the money a woman makes is her own.¹²⁶ Sharing incomes is not a common concept in a Yoruban family, but sharing family expenses is, and the cost of raising children is often split between the husband and wife.

Rural Transportation Issues

Roads in rural Yorubaland are unpaved and in disrepair. They are often impassable during the rainy season due to flooding. These road conditions wear heavily on the poorly maintained cars, buses, vans, and *tanlese* (trucks used to transport produce), making car ownership and repairs expensive. Because of the high cost of maintaining private vehicles, many people in rural areas rely on the inadequate system of public transportation as their main mode of transport.¹²⁷



© Brian Johnson
Overcrowded transportation

¹²⁵ Saint Michael's College. "The Power of Women in West Africa. Gender Roles." No date. <http://academics.smcvt.edu/africanart/Arianne/gender%20roles.htm>

¹²⁶ United Nations University. Zeitlin, Marian F. and Ratna Megawangi, Ellen M. Kramer, Nancy D. Colletta, E.D. Babatunde, and David Garman. "The Yoruba Family." 1995. <http://www.unu.edu/unupress/unupbooks/uu13se/uu13se0e.htm>

¹²⁷ Cornell University Library. Mijinyawa, Yahaya and John Abayomi Adetunji (University of Ibadan). "Evaluation of Farm Transportation Systems in Osun and Oyo States in Nigeria." Abstract. 2005. <http://ecommons.library.cornell.edu/bitstream/1813/2626/53/LW%2005%20004%20Mijinyawa%20final%20Nov2005.pdf>

Exchange 70: Show us the car registration.

Soldier:	Show us the car registration.	fee way ko ha waH
Local:	OK.	mo tee Bo

Checkpoints

Checkpoints, both authorized and unauthorized, are common throughout Nigeria. Their number increases during times of civil unrest. Authorized checkpoints are used as a security measure by local and federal governments. They are staffed by police or military personnel.



© Gatto Giallo
Checkpoint on rural road

Exchange 71: Are you carrying any guns?

Soldier:	Are you carrying any guns?	shay boH waH law way?
Local:	Yes.	banee

The practice of extracting bribes from motorists is widespread throughout the country, and failure to pay bribes has frequently resulted in violence. In addition, there have been reports of violence and verbal harassment toward foreigners at these checkpoints.¹²⁸

Exchange 72: Where is the nearest checkpoint?

Soldier:	Where is the nearest checkpoint?	iboo nee sha key pointee waH nee to see?
Local:	It's two kilometers.	bee ma ilee me jee

Despite the 2007 regulation against independent police checkpoints that was implemented by the Inspector General of the National Police Force, unauthorized checkpoints conducted by rogue policemen and security personnel persist. Cars may be stopped for no reason and arbitrary fines imposed. These checkpoints can occur as often as every few miles on the same stretch of road.¹²⁹

Exchange 73: Please get out of the car.

Soldier:	Please get out of the car.	ja wo bo see leh nin wo ko
Local:	OK.	mo tee Bo

Roadblocks set up by armed gangs frequently occur at night. These groups also extort payments from motorists.¹³⁰ When stopped at an authorized checkpoint, those in the car

¹²⁸ Bureau of Consular Affairs. U.S. Department of State. International Travel Information. "Nigeria." 16 April 2007. http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_987.html

¹²⁹ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. U.S. Department of State. Country Reports on Human Rights Practices. "Nigeria." 11 March 2008. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100498.htm>

¹³⁰ The Weather Channel. "Travel Basics: Nigeria." 2007. http://www.weather.com/outlook/travel/vacationplanner/destination/information-nigeria?from=vac_stateoverview

should act in accordance without question. Because those at the checkpoint are often interested in extorting as much as possible, the amount of the bribe is often dependent on the individual. Violence, and even death, has occurred when someone was unable or unwilling to pay.

Exchange 74: Is this all the ID you have?

Soldier:	Is this all the ID you have?	shay BoBo eway daH nee mo tee oh nee nee yee?
Local:	Yes.	bance

Land Mines

For nearly a decade, Nigeria has had a less-than-transparent policy regarding compliance with weapons treaties. In fact, it has been a somewhat erratic supporter of international conferences on land mines. Nigeria is not a signatory to the International Convention on Conventional Weapons. Following the implementation of the Mine Ban Treaty in March 2002, Nigeria agreed it would use its stockpile of 3,364 antipersonnel mines for training purposes only.



© Mike Blyth
Wreck off the road

Prior to that, mines were laid during the Biafra War in southeastern Nigeria, but have since been removed.¹³¹ Unexploded ordnance (UXO) stored at the Ammunition Transfer Depot in Lagos was detonated in a cycle of arson attacks on 27 January 2002. The explosions affected the nearby market and neighborhoods, resulting in more than 1,000 deaths. The United States sent UXO clearance teams to aid the Nigerian government in clean-up and recovery efforts.¹³² In 2004, Nigeria certified previously mined land, as well as the area affected by the 2002 Lagos bomb blast, as being “cleared of mines.”

Exchange 75: Is this area mined?

Soldier:	Is this area mined?	shay woH ree awoH aH karaH oh low row tee oh lay wo molan ya aBeBe yee?
Local:	Yes.	bance

¹³¹ Landmine Monitor. LM Report 2004. “Nigeria.” 28 February 2005.
<http://www.icbl.org/lm/2004/nigeria.html>

¹³² Bureau of Political-Military Affairs. U.S. State Department. “To Walk the Earth in Safety: The U.S. Commitment to Humanitarian Mine Action.” August 2004.
<http://www.state.gov/t/pm/rls/rpt/walkearth/2004/37227.htm>

Chapter 6 Family Life

Typical Household

Typically, a traditional Yoruba household consists of a patrilocal extended family living in a compound. In most cases, the senior male is also the head of the family. Men are normally polygamous, with each wife having a separate room. Their houses are square one-story structures that are built around a either a traditional central compound or a courtyard. Prior to the colonial period, Yoruban houses had no windows facing the outside.



Exchange 76: Does your family live here?

Soldier:	Does your family live here?	shay aHwoH bee ren Bee bee?
Local:	Yes.	banee

As younger families grow and age they tend to leave the parental compound to start their own compound. Those families who move to cities in search of jobs are forced to adjust to urban living conditions and to accept restricted space. Not infrequently, several families may share a house or building, with each family inhabiting its own room.

Exchange 77: Did you grow up here?

Soldier:	Did you grow up here?	shay ibee low tee daHBa?
Local:	Yes.	banee

Roles and Responsibility

The division of roles and labor in the family follows fairly strict guidelines according to sex. Women are excluded from agricultural work and are expected to work independently of their husbands. Husbands are expected to provide their wives with starting capital so they can generate their own business, earn their own money, and contribute to family expenses.

Exchange 78: Where do you work, sir?

Soldier:	Where do you work, sir?	ijo wo, iboo nee atee she sha, saH?
Local:	I am a farmer, sir.	aBa nee me, saH

In addition to working, women are responsible for caring for the home and the elders. If there are multiple wives, they take turns cooking for their husband although each usually feeds her own children.¹³³

¹³³ United National University Press. *Strengthening the Family – Implications for International Development*. Zeitlin, Marian F. and Ratna Megawangi, Ellen M. Kramer, Nancy D. Colletta, E.D. Babtunde, and David Garman. “The Yoruba Family: Kinship, Socialization, and Child Development.” 1995. <http://www.unu.edu/unupress/unupbooks/uu13se/uu13se0d.htm>

Exchange 79: Are you the only person in your family who has a job?

Soldier:	Are you the only person in your family who has a job?	shay wo nee kon nee ohn she sha nee new a bee rah?
Local:	No.	oh tee

Raising children in an extended-family household is the responsibility of parents, grandparents, and other adults living in the same compound. The Yoruba saying “*Enu kan la fii n tomo*” means “we have to correct the child unanimously.” It signifies that raising children is a communal function that promotes discipline and honor in the family.¹³⁴



© pjotter05 / flickr.com
Mother and child

Exchange 80: How many people live in this house?

Soldier:	How many people live in this house?	aHwoH milow nee ohn Bay nee lay yee?
Local:	Ten.	mey waH

Children are often sent to gather or purchase items needed for the home. Even before they turn five years old, girls learn how to wash, sweep, and cook. Children of both sexes are expected to help around the house at an early age. In addition, older children are given the responsibility of watching their younger siblings or neighbor’s children. The chores given to children are fundamental in teaching them concepts of responsibility and helpfulness that are important in Yoruba society.¹³⁵

Exchange 81: Do you have any brothers?

Soldier:	Do you have any brothers?	shay oh nee ya aHwoH iBo aatee aa broo?
Local:	Yes.	banee

Status of Elderly and Children

Elderly

Aging and death in Yoruba culture are not seen as negative events. Instead, they are celebrated. “*K’Olorun fi iku rere p’agba*,” means “may God bless you with a good death,” and is a common prayer heard throughout Yoruba society. Anyone above the age of 65 years, which is the legal age of retirement, is considered elderly. After reaching this age, elderly people remain at home, sharing their wisdom and caring for their grandchildren.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Metanexus Institute. Raymond, Ogunade. “Spirituality and Human Flourishing Among the Yoruba.” June 2006. <http://www.metanexus.net/conferences/pdf/conference2006/Ogunade.pdf>

¹³⁵ University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point. Ogunnaike, Oluyomi. “Yoruba Toddler’s Engagement in Errands and Cognitive Performance on the Yoruba Mental Subscale.” No date. <http://www.uwsp.edu/education/oogunnai/Errands.htm>

¹³⁶ *Anthropologist*. Vol. 8, No. 3. Ajala, Aderemi Suleiman. “The Changing Perception of Agein [sic] in Yoruba Culture and Its Implications on the Health of the Elderly.” 2006. <http://www.krepublishers.com/02->

Children

In Yoruba society, the importance of having children is reflected in the familiar lyrics “a child is a coral bead; a child is silver / a person who has none / has not lived a full life.” Having children elevates the status of a woman in her marriage and in the community.¹³⁷ Children not only contribute economically to the household, they also provide care for the parents as they age. Because the Yoruba believe in reincarnation, it is believed children are born with the soul of an ancestor.



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Young Nigerian girl

Twins in Yoruban Society

The Yoruba people have the highest rate of twin births worldwide, with twins accounting for 4.5% of all births. The birth of twins is celebrated, as twins are believed have supernatural powers that can bring happiness and prosperity. However, because it is believed that they can also bring misfortune to both community and family when they are upset, parents are very lenient with their twin children. In addition, the mother follows strict guidelines set by the *babalawos*, including what foods and clothing colors to avoid. Because twins are thought to share one soul, the death of one is thought to greatly affect the other. If this occurs, an *ere ibeji*, or sacred image is carved and cared for as if alive.¹³⁸

Married Life

Marriageable age for a man is 25 to 30 years, while women usually marry during their late teenage years or early 20s. Young men and women today are free to choose their partners, but parents are still accorded the honor of approving the offspring’s prospective mate. This is because marriage is viewed as not only uniting the two people but also both their families. One impediment to any marriage is the possibility of a blood relationship between a man and woman. Among the Yoruba as with other ethnic groups, e.g., Fulani and Hausa, more that 90% of marriages occur within ethnic groups. Newly married couples reside in the husband’s family compound. Polygamy continues to be practiced in Yoruban culture. It is seen as acceptable if a man’s finances permit him to support more than one wife. When polygamy occurs, the first wife assumes the role of senior wife. The wives will each have their own room or house on the compound.¹³⁹

Exchange 82: Is this your wife?

Soldier:	Is this your wife?	shay yaHwo raa nee yee?
Local:	Yes.	bance

Journals/T-Anth/Anth-08-0-000-000-2006-Web/Anth-08-3-147-214-2006-Abst-PDF/Anth-08-3-181-188-2006-345-%20Ajala-A-S/Anth-08-3-181-188-2006-345-%20Ajala-A-S-Text.pdf

¹³⁷ *Nordic Journal of African Studies*. Vol. 13, No. 2. Makinde, Taiwo. “Motherhood as a Source of Empowerment of Women in Yoruba Culture [p. 164–174.]” 2004. <http://www.njas.helsinki.fi/pdf-files/vol13num2/makinde.pdf>

¹³⁸ Bryn Mawr College. “Ere Ibejis: Yoruba Twin Figures from the Bryan Mar College Collection.” No Date. <http://www.brynmawr.edu/collections/Exhibitions/exh-ibeji.shtml>

¹³⁹ University of Georgia. Ojo, Akinloye, Ed. “Yoruba Omo Oduduwa: Papers on Yoruba People, Language, and Culture.” August 1999. <http://www.uga.edu/aflang/YORUBA/ODUDUWA.htm>

Divorce

Although discouraged in Yoruba society, divorce has become widespread. Surprisingly, it is more common for a woman to seek divorce from her husband than the inverse. Legal divorces are governed by the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1971, which recognizes only civil divorce and is seen as largely incompatible with Christian, Muslim, or animist practices.¹⁴⁰ Because men may practice polygamy, they do not have the incentive to divorce a woman unless she has been unfaithful. A woman may seek a divorce for many reasons, such as abuse, drunkenness, or infectious disease. However, when a woman does seek divorce, she often must repay the bride price. Other divorce requirements are a function of the family's religion, i.e., Christian, Muslim, or traditional.¹⁴¹

Exchange 83: Are you married?

Soldier:	Are you married?	shay oh nee yaHwo?
Local:	No.	banee

Family Celebrations

Birth

Most family celebrations have their origin in animist beliefs, but have been adopted by adherents of Islam and Christianity. The birth of a child, for example, is a joyous occasion in the Yoruba household, and celebrations start immediately following the birth. Three days later, the *babalawos*, or high priest, is called upon to perform an *ese-ne-taye*, or birth blessing. During this ceremony, the *babalawos* will determine the child's future and what needs to be done to ensure that the child fulfills its destiny. For the seven or nine days following the birth, the oldest woman in the house cares for both mother and child, keeping them indoors.¹⁴²

Exchange 84: Is this your entire family?

Soldier:	Is this your entire family?	shay Bobo abee raa nee yee?
Local:	Yes.	banee

Naming Ceremony

The naming ceremony, *ewi*, is carried out as quickly after birth as possible in the belief that a delayed naming ceremony will shorten the life of the child. The name is usually chosen by the eldest paternal male relative. Naming a Yoruban child is a community-wide celebration in which family and friends take part. They gather in the early morning and bring various materials, which always include



© Mike Blyth
Family and friends at a naming ceremony

¹⁴⁰ Oxford University Press. International Journal of Law, Policy, and the Family. "Termination of Marriage in Nigerian Family Laws: The Need for Reform and the Relevance of the Tanzanian Experience." 1996. <http://lawfam.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/10/3/281>

¹⁴¹ University of Georgia. Ojo, Akinloye, Ed. "Yoruba Omo Oduduwa: Papers on Yoruba People, Language, and Culture." August 1999. <http://www.uga.edu/aflang/YORUBA/ODUDUWA.htm>

¹⁴² Metanexus Institute. Raymond, Ogunade. "Spirituality and Human Flourishing Among the Yoruba." June 2006. <http://www.metanexus.net/conferences/pdf/conference2006/Ogunade.pdf>

palm oil, kola nuts, salt, honey, yam, water, and sugarcane. These symbolic items are then used in prayers for the child's future. The ceremony begins with sprinkling the child with water, after which the child's name is announced publicly for the first time, although it is chosen by the parents almost immediately. Dancing and feasting follow with poets often singing praises of the child and family.¹⁴³

Exchange 85: Are these people part of your family?

Soldier:	Are these people part of your family?	shay abee ran ya aH woH nee yaw yee?
Local:	No.	oh tee

Naming Conventions

Names are chosen by paternal elder males after much consideration since it is widely believed that a name can influence the child's future. Additional attribution names can be bestowed upon the child by the father, mother, or the grandparents. First, the child receives its personal name, the *oruko*, which usually echoes events that occurred at birth or are reflective of the family. For example, twins are named for the order in which they come—*taiwo* for the first born and *kehinde* for the second—while a child born to an *oba* (king) will have a name beginning with *Ade* (crown).¹⁴⁴ The second name, known as the praise name or *oriki*, is used to convey hopes for the future. Third, the kinship name, *orile*, is passed on through the father's side.¹⁴⁵



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Nigerian children at the market

Exchange 86: Are these your children?

Soldier:	Are these your children?	shay aH woH mo raa nee yee?
Local:	Yes.	banee

¹⁴³ University of Georgia. Ojo, Akinloye, Ed. "Yoruba Omo Oduduwa: Papers on Yoruba People, Language, and Culture." August 1999. <http://www.uga.edu/aflang/YORUBA/ODUDUWA.htm>

¹⁴⁴ Motherland Nigeria. "Yoruba Names." c.1998–2007. <http://www.motherlandnigeria.com/names.html>

¹⁴⁵ A *World of Baby Names*. Norman, Teresa. "African Names [p. 1]." 2003. New York: The Berkeley Publishing Group.

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